OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE AND INFLUENCE

OF THE

POOR LAWS;

FOUNDED ON EXPERIENCE;

AND

A PLAN,

PROPOSED FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF

Parliament:

BY WHICH

THE AFFAIRS OF THE POOR MAY IN FUTURE BE BETTER REGULATED; THEIR MORALS, AND HABITS OF INDUSTRY, GREATLY IMPROVED;

AND

A CONSIDERABLE REDUCTION IN THE POORS RATES EFFECTED.

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PREFACE.

THE Author, who writes on a ſubject which has afforded ſo much employment to Parliament and the Preſs, muſt feel the propriety, if not neceſsity, of aſsigning ſome reaſon for intruding his opinion on a topic, however important, which has been ſo ably inveſtigated by the firſt characters in the kingdom.

The Writer of the following ſheets has been encouraged to give the Public the reſult of his experience in the management of the Poor, from its having furniſhed him with ideas on the method of conducting that concern, materially different, in ſome reſpects, from any hitherto propoſed; and from his not having been able to find, that any preceding Authors had ſubmitted their theoretical opinions to the teſt of experience, before they had been given to the Public.

Theſe conſiderations received great additional weight, when "*a Bill for the* "*better ſupport and maintenance of the* "*Poor*," was brought into Parliament by Mr. Pitt, but ſuſpended in its progreſs.

The fate of this Bill, though ſupported by ſo much ability, zeal, and influence; (and attended with the advantage of an introductory ſpeech, that fixed the attention of the Public, and ſeemed to ſecure its ſucceſs,) proved, in the Author's opinion, that Parliament was not the place where detailed regulations for the Poor ſhould originate; and that we were not yet prepared, by previous practical information and arrangement, to form clauſes for the protection of poverty, without the riſk of encouraging idleneſs, to the diminution of the comforts of the Poor, and to the increaſe of Public burthens. He is, indeed, convinced, that by every attempt at being liberal to the Poor (on the preſent ſyſtem), we ſhall render their ſituation more deplorable, and, at the

the ſame time, increaſe the public expence, and means of peculation.

The preſent period ſeems peculiarly favourable for attempting to meliorate the condition of the lower orders, by inviting them to *induſtry where there is ability*, and by affording *kind protection where that is wanting*; for when we arrive at a tolerable ſtate of perfection in this ſcience, we ſhall connect and bind the higher and lower ranks of ſociety, in a manner that muſt completely ſet at defiance every attempt to introduce into this country, the deſtructive doctrines of a neighbouring kingdom.

While on this ſubject, it may not be improper to obſerve, that though one of the hopes of ſucceſs, in our enemies, has been defeated by a bold and fortunate plan of finance, they have ſtill another in the ſtate of our Poors-rates and Poor-laws. The preſent French Government have ſtiled our Poors-rates, "the moſt deſtructive gangrene of our Conſtitution;" and Thomas Paine, who has laboured ſo much

to deſtroy all our bleſsings (happily without effect), has exultingly ſaid, "that "the adminiſtration of our code of Poor-"laws, will, if continued, in time effect, "with certainty, the deſtruction of our "Conſtitution." May our Government exert itſelf with equal ſucceſs to baffle this laſt hope of our inveterate foes.

Theſe reaſons have operated ſtrongly in the Author's mind, to induce him to add his mite to the general ſtock of information, on a ſubject, ſuperior to every other, in the extent of its effects on the national character; or the happineſs a very large portion of the community are capable of enjoying, by the adoption of a good ſyſtem in the management of the Poor.

In the year 1796 a circumſtance occurred, which put it in his power to obtain particular and ſpecific information on the ſubject of the following pages, and afforded the opportunity, which he has now embraced, of preſenting to the view of the Public, a mode of conducting

ducting the affairs of the Poor, which has been attended with ſome peculiar advantages.

He was engaged, at that period, with other gentlemen, in forming the plan of a *School of Induſtry*, which was nearly ready to be carried into execution about Eaſter, 1796, when it appeared evident, that this favourite inſtitution was ſo connected with, and dependent on the official concerns of the Poor, as to be in imminent danger from any claſhing of intereſts in that quarter. The difficulty could only be got over by one of its promoters acting as an *Overſeer*.

This requeſt was made to the Author, with ſuch earneſtneſs, and aſſurances of ſupport and aſsiſtance, as induced him (being ignorant of *ſome* of the duties attached to the ſituation) to accept the appointment, in which he was able to perſevere for two years, by the conſtant and uniform protection of many reſpectable perſons who then attended the Veſtries; and by their re-

lieving him from thoſe points of duty, that could be as well or better done by others.

The Writer's zeal in the cauſe was conſiderably rouſed, by the ſentiments contained in Count Rumford's experimental Eſſays, and a converſation he favoured him with on the ſubject; ſo that whatever advantage may have been derived, by the late method of conducting the concerns of the Poor, in the pariſh of Lewiſham, ſhould be aſcribed, in a great meaſure, to his ſpirited example.

Having acquired, in the execution of the office he had accepted, a competent knowledge of the duties of an Overſeer, the Author's attention was early directed to the ſituation he was placed in by the Poor-laws, and it was ſoon evident, that the powers granted him were very great, and extremely different from what has been ever put into the hands of an individual in any other public or private capacity.

He is authorized to demand any ſum or ſums of money from the pariſh, which he receives

receives and expends, without any intervening check or controul. Beſides this opportunity of abuſing confidence, the Overſeer has not the ſmalleſt temptation from fee, reward, or future credit, to execute the truſt with attention; for he is not allowed to receive any compenſation for his ſervices, and the Public are ſeldom ſufficiently acquainted with the detail of parochial management, to give credit where it is due. To complete the deſcription of this abſurd ſyſtem, the Pariſh that is fortunate enough to meet with an Overſeer, who executes the duty in a rigid and conſcientious manner, cannot continue to avail itſelf of his ſervices, but *muſt* change him every other, if not *every* year. There is, therefore, a total want of ſtimulus to exertion, in a ſituation where confidence is given in an unbounded degree.

A moment's reflection will convince us, that a public or private eſtabliſhment conducted on this principle, muſt be loaded with all the evil conſequences that attend the

the adminiſtration of relief to the Poor; and inſtead of imputing blame to the Overſeer, the whole fault is to be aſcribed to the ſyſtem.

The author has therefore conſidered the fluctuating appointment of Overſeer, with the authority given him by Parliament, and the compulſory duty impoſed on him, as the root of all the evil that has crept into the management of the concerns of the Poor, and for which he has endeavoured to point out a remedy.

This idea had not been altogether loſt ſight of by others, but it forms a material part of his plan. If his opinion is correct, we ſhall not advance one ſtep in improving the comforts or bettering the condition of the Poor, till we alter the eſtabliſhment in this reſpect.

It appears equally evident to the Author, that Parliament cannot poſſeſs the means of legiſlating with effect in improving the Poor-laws; or the public de-

rive

rive all that information and advantage, which the collected practice of near thirteen thousand parishes might afford, unless there is an establishment for the purpose of arranging materials, diffusing the knowledge of the improved practice of particular districts or individual parishes, and for furnishing Parliament with facts drawn up in a concise form, from the unerring source of such extended practice.

These are the great outlines of what has been recommended and enlarged upon in the following pages, with other considerations of less note.

As he has had occasion to notice much of what has been written or proposed on the subject, he has felt it his duty to state, unreservedly, wherein he differs in opinion from very high and respectable authorities. Liberal and fair discussion are indispensibly necessary to bring us to the great object of all our wishes.

Mr.

Mr. Pitt, in the introductory ſpeech to his bill ſays, " * He had always conſi-
" dered the ſubject as one of the moſt
" important that could ever occupy a
" man's attention, and one that ought
" not to depend on the opinions or infor-
" mation of one perſon only, but upon
" the *general knowledge and inveſtigation of*
" *all who choſe to make it matter of in-*
" *quiry.*"

If we all engage with the ſame liberal ſentiments in the diſcuſsion of this ſubject, the Author truſts that his remarks will not expoſe him to cenſure.

As to what concerns the local hiſtory in this publication, he feels it incumbent on him to explain himſelf more fully.—It has been his determination on this occaſion, to ſuppreſs every circumſtance that was not neceſſary to illuſtrate his arguments, and to this he thinks he has ſtrictly adhered. He would, on the other

* See Woodfall's Parliamentary Reports, No. 10. Publiſhed Jan. 21, 1797.

hand,

hand, have been ill qualified to conduct a fair diſcuſsion of the ſubject, if he had kept back (from any motive) what was neceſſary to elucidate matters in point. If there ſhould however be an idea from what he has ſaid, that the Poor in the Pariſh of Lewiſham have been neglected, or improperly treated, he muſt be allowed to ſtate, that ſo far from that having been the caſe, the general management of the Poor in this pariſh has always been fully as good as that of any other he knows, (not under the directions of a Special Act of Parliament,) whether conſidered as to the expence, or attention to the comforts of the Poor.

The Author thinks the practice upon the whole has been better than we could expect under ſo diſadvantageous a ſyſtem; for what officer could be expected to give up his time in ſelecting objects proper for relief, in eſtabliſhing a manufacture, or ſimplifying the ſtatements of expence, in the courſe of one, or at moſt two years ſervice, with very little chance

of the plan being adopted by thoſe who ſucceed him.

The objections which have been ſtated apply not to the Overſeer, but to the office; and though this pariſh has been occaſionally quoted as an inſtance of imperfection in the preſent ſyſtem, the Author could perhaps have ſcarcely met with a leſs ſtriking proof of the arguments he has advanced.

He has been ſometimes obliged to defend his conduct againſt attacks evidently dictated by intereſted views, but the only regret he then felt, was, that the ſyſtem admitted the exerciſe of ſuch unworthy motives. He has been obliged with ſome reluctance to hint at this circumſtance in the following pages, though he never thought it deſerving of any other notice; but it was neceſſary to prove, what he conſiders as the great cauſe of the ſeceſsion of the reſpectable part of ſociety from the ſervice of the Poor, and to point out how eaſily the evil might be removed.

If

If the following ſheets ſhould afford one uſeful hint for improving the ſituation of the Poor, the Writer of them will be highly gratified, and amply rewarded for the time and attention he has beſtowed on the ſubject.

South End, Kent, Feb. 4, 1799.

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STATE

STATE OF THE POOR

IN THE

PARISH OF LEWISHAM,

IN THE

COUNTY OF KENT.

IN the year 1795, the Gentlemen of the Pariſh of Lewiſham opened a ſubſcription for the relief of the lower claſs of people, ſuffering from the unexampled high price of bread, &c. The humane diſpoſition of the opulent was ſtrongly marked by a liberal collection in the ſpace of a few days, to the amount of three hundred and thirty-one pounds, which was employed at firſt in furniſhing bread to each family, in proportion to their numbers; but was, I think, more judiciouſly directed afterwards in allowances of meat and potatoes.

This circumſtance ſeemed to give, for the firſt time, a general turn in the minds of ſeveral reſpectable gentlemen in the pariſh to the ſituation of our poor; and it was ſoon diſcovered, that all temporary aid of this ſort would be very ineffectual, if we could not produce, at leaſt in the younger part of the community, the habits of induſtry and morality, hitherto univerſally neglected.

About this period, the publications of Count Rumford were the ſubject of general converſation, and the objects of admiration. His wonderful efforts to better the condition of the poor, by training them to habits of induſtry, with the ſucceſsful plans of the Rev. Mr. Boyer and others, firſt ſuggeſted the propriety and advantage of inſtituting a School of Induſtry for the employment of the children of labourers and poor pariſhioners. The liberality of the gentlemen and ladies of the pariſh, with the aſsiſtance and indefatigable exertions of the firſt characters

in

in the neighbourhood, reduced the plan to practice in the month of May, 1796.

It was my intention to have given a very full account of the ſucceſs of this plan, and the extraordinary alteration which is generally allowed to have taken place in the manners and habits of the younger part of the pariſhioners ſince its inſtitution; but this has been better given to the public in the Fourth Report of the Society for bettering the Condition, and increaſing the Comforts of the Poor, (a publication which ſhould be read and conſulted by every perſon who has a diſpoſition to promote the happineſs of his fellow-creatures,) ſo that I ſhall only have occaſion to mention it as connected with the ſubject of this publication. It occurred to thoſe who thought moſt cloſely on the buſineſs, that in order to protect this plan, it would be neceſſary for ſome of the gentlemen who patroniſed the inſtitution, to ſtep into the ſituation of *Overſeer*, and by that means preſerve an underſtanding be-

tween it, and the official concerns of the poor, ſo neceſſary for the welfare of both. This requeſt was made to me, and the motive operated with ſuch force on my mind, as to induce me, without heſitation, to accept the office of one of the Overſeers of the pariſh, at Eaſter 1796. My intention having been purely and avowedly to protect our favourite plan for the employment of the poor; and my determination being as avowedly to avoid every ſort of retroſpect, I did expect to have executed the taſk I undertook without exciting much jealouſy or oppoſition. If the knowledge I have gained during the active ſhare I had in managing the affairs of the pariſh for two years, throws any light on a ſubject of the firſt importance to ſociety, I ſhall think my time well employed. I am convinced, if the buſineſs of the poor is ever well underſtood in this country, it muſt be from the communications and hints of thoſe who have been in the habit of knowing the practices made uſe of in managing them. The neceſsity of chang-

ing the preſent plan is ſo univerſally admitted, both in and out of Parliament, that it would be perfectly ſuperfluous to dwell much on the importance of deviſing the means of reducing the number of our poor, diminiſhing our rates, and above all, providing comfortably for the relief of *real objects*. I have long thought that we cannot proceed on ſure grounds in carrying ſuch a plan into execution, without firſt knowing what are the defects of the preſent ſyſtem; to what cauſes we are to aſcribe the accumulated evils which have attended it; and how it happens that millions, collected for the relief of the indigent, has increaſed their number, poverty, and wretchedneſs, in a ratio nearly equal to an increaſe of rates.

In deſcribing the former and late practices of this pariſh, I wiſh it to be clearly underſtood, that ſo far from meaning to paſs any cenſure on the general conduct of the preceding Overſeers, I ſee much to commend in the management of

ſeveral, who have ſtruggled (ſome with more effect than others) to reduce the rates, and better the ſituation of the poor; but is it to be expected that a perſon, with at leaſt the plea of being forced into the appointment, holding it for the ſhort ſpace of one, or at *moſt* two years, will attempt a reform, at the riſque of offending his predeceſſors in office (probably his friends and fellow-aſſociates), and all this on the chance of his ſyſtem being followed up by thoſe who ſucceed him? This idea is too abſurd to be ſuppoſed. After ſtating, both from duty and inclination, thoſe reaſons which in many caſes may have fairly induced Overſeers to act in the perſeverance of a ſyſtem ſo obviouſly deſtructive of every good purpoſe, I truſt that my treating the ſubject without reſerve will not lead to any imputation of my acting from motives that are perſonal, or even parochial. I ſhall endeavour as much as poſsible to confine my remarks to ſuch matters as may apply to general regulations reſpecting the management of the poor. The circumſtance of my being

an anxious promoter of the ſchool of induſtry, brought me very accidentally into the ſituation of an Overſeer; and having a duty to perform, which in my opinion is of the firſt importance to ſociety in general, I was determined it ſhould be executed with a rigid attention on my part to the great outlines of the buſineſs, and without ſuffering myſelf to be miſled by the prejudices of thoſe who went before me. I ſtood on independent ground, and was determined to maintain it. I had not a party to eſpouſe; a tradeſman or publican to favour with a job or a pariſh dinner; an adherent to give an appointment to; or a motive that could induce me to act with partiality.

Wiſhing to render the ſubject as clear and diſtinct as poſsible, I mean to treat of the poor under thoſe heads which will give the beſt idea of their ſituation, the relief uſually adminiſtered, and the manner in which it was adminiſtered by myſelf. I ſhall therefore begin with ſome obſervations on the ſtate of the workhouſe,

then proceed to what are termed the penſion and caſualty liſts, with the expence of clothing. Theſe, with the bill for medical aſsiſtance, county-rate money, and expence of maintaining lunatics (as in our pariſh), comprehend, or *ſhould* comprehend, nearly the whole of the claims on the poors-rates. The inhabitants of the workhouſe of Lewiſham conſiſted, as all workhouſes do, of the profligate and worthleſs part of the community, of *ſome* deſerving poor, and of orphan children, or thoſe who have been deſerted by their parents. Of the firſt claſs there will always be a large proportion, when a workhouſe does not furniſh *work* for its inmates; and this was unfortunately the caſe at Lewiſham. I ſhall leave my reader to form his own idea of the effects of holding out an aſylum to the idle and worthleſs part of ſociety, and of rearing the younger in ſuch company, and with ſuch habits of filth and lazineſs, the inevitable conſequences of the plan. The evil made ſo great an impreſsion on my mind as to induce me to furniſh immediate

diate employment to the poor, and afterwards to propoſe an addition to the building, which was agreed to accordingly, and in a very ſhort time the poor were employed in picking oakum for his Majeſty's yard at Deptford, being accommodated with an excellent work-room, and ſleeping apartments over it, in a manner extremely comfortable, and very different from what they had been uſed to. There was a daily account kept of their work, and they received an allowance of two-pence on each ſhilling earned. I believe this change gave ſoon as much ſatisfaction to the pariſh. The plan ſent ſeveral out of the houſe, who loved idleneſs and dirt more than any thing elſe, but who were determined if they *muſt* work, that it ſhould be for themſelves.

I had ever conſidered the bringing together the bad characters of a pariſh, and aſſociating them with the unfortunate children neceſſarily thrown on that fund for protection, as one of the great defects

of

of a workhouſe, and leading in its conſequences to perpetuating the collected vices of the worthleſs poor in the riſing generation. It is impoſsible, in my opinion, to deſcribe how ſhort we ſhall ever be of perfection in the management of the poor, while people of all ages and deſcriptions live together in a workhouſe, as they generally do. I was ſo ſtrongly impreſſed with this idea, that I concerted a plan for boarding and lodging all the pariſh boys and girls, above the age of five, at the School of Induſtry, and effected it about a twelvemonth before I quitted the office. The good which muſt reſult from this one arrangement, will produce in the end incalculable advantages to the pariſh, and ſociety in general.

The demand for boys and girls educated on this plan has been ſo great, that all above the age of twelve have been taken away to work at other manufactures, and are no longer a burthen on the pariſh. Of the average number of twenty-one pariſh children in the School of Induſtry in the

firſt

firſt ten months, eleven were taken away for the purpoſes above-mentioned—and it is more than probable, had they remained in the workhouſe, not one of the eleven would have been applied for. The vacancies at the School of Induſtry have been filled up from the penſion liſt, or by children from the workhouſe, as they became of age to be removed. The earnings of the workhouſe children in the School of Induſtry, have in the courſe of even the firſt ten months, amounted to about forty pounds, a clear gain to the public.

The alterations I had made by the employment of the poor, had begun to excite much jealouſy in the minds of ſome of thoſe who had gone through the office of overſeer; and I ſoon found that every new ground I took, would be liable to cenſure and miſconſtruction. My having introduced the uſe of rice into the workhouſe, from the knowledge I had of its valuable properties, as well as its being one of the beſt ſubſtitutes for bread (then a very dear article), excited ſo much oppoſition,

poſition, and gave riſe to reports ſo injurious and unjuſt, that ſome of my friends mentioned it to me in a very ſerious manner. Theſe malevolent reporters, not being able to diſcover ſigns of unhealthineſs in the houſe, had penetrated into the moſt private receſſes of it, to diſcover ſymptoms of diſeaſe from the uſe of rice. This, and ſome other circumſtances, proving that there were people ready to go *all* lengths, in attempts to find cauſe of complaint, determined me againſt adopting any material reform with reſpect to the diet in the houſe, by which I am convinced that two hundred pounds a year might have been ſaved. The average expence of feeding our poor in the workhouſe, including old and young, has been 4s. 1d. per week each, notwithſtanding the precaution of having procured all articles by open contract, when it could be done, and that every bill for articles conſumed in the houſe, was certified by the maſter of the workhouſe before it was paid; and theſe bills are now in the hands of the veſtry clerk, for the inſpection of any

perſon

perſon who may wiſh to ſee them. I muſt be allowed to take this opportunity of ſaying, that no blame can attach to the maſter of the workhouſe for this heavy expence. I am convinced the articles were all received by him, and I believe all expended in the houſe. I found him in the ſituation I have left him; and I think it is impoſsible to meet with people better qualified in every reſpect than Mr. and Mrs. Burton, for the duties they have to perform.

Thoſe gentlemen who have peruſed the Reports of the Society before mentioned, on the œconomy that has been lately practiſed with reſpect to food and nouriſhment, will readily admit that two hundred pounds a year might be eaſily ſaved at Lewiſham, by a more judicious diet, without any reſtriction as to quantity. It appears by a paper of the Biſhop of Durham's, given in the 4th Report of the ſame Society, that the Rev. Dr. Gilpin, after having aſsiſted in procuring a new and comfortable houſe for the accommodation of the

poor

poor in the pariſh of Boldre, Hants, had introduced a Bill of Fare, with ſo much œconomy as to reduce the expence of feeding them to leſs than the half of what it uſed to be, and not to exceed the ſum of nine-pence a head weekly. This is mentioned as one of the many proofs of what may be done by method, and a good table of diet, without curtailing the neceſſaries, or even comforts of thoſe who are the objects of this œconomy.

The *Penſion Liſt*, which we are next to conſider, has been entirely aboliſhed in many pariſhes; but though it requires great checks and controul, I am clearly of opinion that there are frequently objects who ſhould, from motives of humanity, as well as policy, have ſmall allowances from the Penſion Liſt, in preference to bringing them, or any of their family, into a workhouſe—this ſhould be done to orderly, well-behaved families, which are numerous, though there are certainly caſes, where children had better be in a well-regulated Houſe of Induſtry than even

with

with their parents. This liſt requires frequent checks, inſpection and controul, to prevent its falling into abuſe; but with ſuch attention I have encouraged this mode of relief; and the pariſh has, for the two years I was in office, paid about two-hundred and ſixty pounds a year in penſions, including the allowance for nurſe children.

If my object had been merely to boaſt of ſaving, I had many precedents in the neighbourhood for aboliſhing this liſt, leaving the poor with the only alternative of coming into the workhouſe, or being deprived of relief.

The *Caſualty Liſt* includes thoſe who apply for temporary relief from various cauſes, ſuch as ſickneſs, accidents, want of employment, &c. It was the practice of ſuch paupers to apply, at all hours of the day, to the Overſeer, and take the chance of meeting him at home, and finding him diſpoſed, and at leiſure to examine the merits of the caſe, and do what was proper. I had often ſeen

paupers at the door of an Overſeer for hours together; and I believe that frequently, after ſpending the day there, they have left it in the evening, without being able to ſee him; and I am likewiſe convinced it has often happened that the importunity of a worthleſs, idle object, has, by perſeverance at the door of the Overſeer, obtained relief when he ſhould have been ſent to work. Theſe were two great evils, which I wiſhed to prevent. Humanity dictated the neceſsity of aſcertaining the time and mode of affording relief, without its depending on any uncertainty, with reſpect to the Overſeer. I therefore appointed one day in the week for hearing the applications of the poor at the church; at which time and place they were *ſure* of being attended to, and ſuch relief afforded them as their ſituation ſeemed to require. This arrangement gave much ſatisfaction to thoſe whoſe claims bore that inveſtigation, which was done deliberately and temperately. I had likewiſe, in compliance with the Act of Parliament, kept a regular Regiſter of all

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applications, in a form which I had adopted, and ſtrictly adhered to. This liſt now conſtitutes very nearly a complete hiſtory of the Poor of the pariſh; and to any perſon who wiſhes for information on the manner in which relief was granted, and the grounds on which it was refuſed (for all applications were entered, whether relieved or not), I ſhould wiſh to refer them to that book, now in the hands of the veſtry clerk. The maſter of the workhouſe had the diſcretionary power of relieving in any extraordinary caſe, and to report the ſame immediately after. Such caſes occurred very ſeldom; and I certainly never meant that relief ſhould be granted in that way, without the plea of urgency. It may be proper to obſerve here, that Mr. Clark, a reſpectable renter in the pariſh, acted with me for the laſt twelvemonths, as joint Overſeer, and as he had conſented to my managing the finances of the pariſh, and had kindly attended the duty at the Bench, removing the Paupers, &c. I cannot do him juſtice, without declaring that I always found

him, in the diſintereſted line of duty which he performed, a ready and able colleague. I have dwelt the longer on this ſubject, becauſe it has been made the ground of a charge of neglect in me, the not being *at all times* ready to grant *every ſort* of relief. My mode of doing it excludes a very heavy charge, for which no voucher was expected, and to the amount of which there could not poſsibly be the ſmalleſt check. It is likewiſe certain, that I acted in compliance with the Act of Parliament; and the Overſeer who does not regiſter thoſe who receive collection, pay, or relief, with the day and year, and the occaſion that brought them under that neceſsity, acts in direct oppoſition to it.

Let us now ſee how this regulation affects the Poor. The regular houſeholder who wants relief, will have credit with his tradeſmen till the day of application, becauſe it does not then depend on the accidental circumſtance of the Overſeer being in the way; but if the caſe is made out,

out, the relief is ſure to follow, and bear a proportion to the ſtate and wants of the family, in a degree beyond what it ever uſed to do. The vagrant, by having the power of aſſailing the Overſeer at all times, may now and then obtain by importunity a ſhilling or two; but it would be much better, both for the vagrant and the pariſh, if ſuch money had been thrown into the ſea, than beſtowed in that manner. If my plan therefore diſcourages vagrancy, without injuring the ſtationary Poor, and deſtroys the idea of its being the duty of an Overſeer to have his hand always in his pocket, I think the benefit from it muſt be great; and this has been one of the happy conſequences of the method I had adopted. It was ſcarcely neceſſary to have ſaid ſo much in vindication of a plan, in direct compliance with the Act of Parliament (ſee Burn's Juſtice, laſt edition, third vol. page 826); but the argument againſt this practice has been ſtrongly urged, on the faſcinating plea of humanity. If I have outraged humanity by any plan of mine, the records of the pariſh, and the publicity

with which all the buſineſs was done for the laſt two years, muſt bear teſtimony againſt me.

There is little to obſerve on the ſubject of clothing, except that I always endeavoured to furniſh this article, as well as the meat, bread, beer, &c. for the houſe, by open contract; and by which the pariſh has ſaved conſiderably. Many articles of clothing have been furniſhed by the School of Induſtry, which proved, in point of durability, far ſuperior to the ſhop goods; and when we conſider that the Poor of this pariſh have been now, for the firſt time, clothed with the produce of their own hands, may we not hope that the riſing generation of Paupers will, by ſuch good and induſtrious habits, be able to do without the aid of a workhouſe.

I have always conſidered medical relief as leſs liable to abuſe than almoſt any other, and have therefore granted it in every caſe, where it has been applied for, without any minute inveſtigation. I have likewiſe frequently offered that aid to

the Poor, applying for pecuniary relief on account of ſickneſs. This duty has been liberally performed, and, as far as I can learn, very much to their ſatisfaction. I have always requeſted the medical gentleman who attends them, to order food, wine, and every thing that could promote their recovery, without reſerve; for I am convinced, that independent of what humanity dictates, it ſhould be done on the ſcore of policy. I think I could now mention one or two fathers of large families who have been reſcued from the grave, or at leaſt from having been cripples for life, by the ſkill and attention of the ſurgeon, ſeconded by the liberal aſsiſtance of the pariſh.

After having generally ſtated all that I think neceſſary reſpecting the great duties of an Overſeer, as applicable to all pariſhes; I ſhall not trouble my reader with any detail, but ſay a few words on the finances of our pariſh, and the means by which the comforts and habits of the Poor have been ſo much improved. The rate which has been paid for a few years

back, has been three ſhillings, granted at two periods in the year, making one ſhilling and ſix-pence in the pound each time. The groſs amount of our two half-yearly rates is within a trifle of two thouſand pounds, and this may be conſidered (without deſcending to minutiæ) as the revenue of the pariſh, ſetting the labour of the Paupers, with penalties for baſtardy, &c. againſt empty houſes and defaulters. At Eaſter 1796, I found, very unexpectedly, that there were heavy unſatisfied claims on the poors rates, and that this debt had been gradually increaſing; marking, as far as I could collect from very imperfect vouchers, that the revenue had fallen ſhort of the expences from Eaſter 1794, to 1796, conſiderably more than one hundred pounds each year, on an increaſing ratio. I was ſo little acquainted with the poor laws as to indulge a hope that this debt might be paid by a rate demanded for that purpoſe, by which means ample and immediate juſtice might have been done to the creditors, without confounding the paſt tranſactions with the future. The legiſla-

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ture however forbids the allowance of a rate for the payment of debts, and does therefore tacitly deny its acknowledgement of any ſuch claim. This was a difficulty I had to encounter, and I ſoon found that the hopes of the friends of the old ſyſtem reſted much on my being obliged to call for an extraordinary rate. This expectation had gained ſuch ground that I never met them on the ſubject of a rate, without having to contend for leſs than they wiſhed to give me. This was a wonderful phænomenon, but when it is conſidered how little gentlemen trouble themſelves with the parochial concerns of the poor, and that almoſt the only means of their judging of the management of the buſineſs, was by the quantum of rates they had to pay; no further explanation of this conduct will be neceſſary. While I endeavoured to ſave my plan from the diſgrace of an extraordinary call on the pariſh, I was deſirous of meeting every expence within the year, and therefore determined on having the ſame rate as before, which, on a fair calculation (with the few mate-

rials I had for forming it) ſeemed to me equal to the current expence of the year, and to furniſh a ſurplus of ſeveral hundred pounds for the new building, &c.

I am very ſorry that this part of the ſubject obliges me to ſay more of the former practice of the pariſh officers than I could wiſh, but without it I ſhould not be able to explain how the revenue from the poors rates, for the firſt year of my being in office, fell ſhort of my calculation.

It has been the cuſtom for the Overſeers in this pariſh to manage the affairs of the Poor by the month alternately, perfectly diſtinct from each other, and I believe very frequently without any communication. An unequal portion of the collection was taken by each, as a fund for this purpoſe, and the elder officer, in the ſcramble for the greater ſum, has generally ſucceeded. It therefore fell to the lot of the perſon who had been Overſeer the year before I came into office, and continued by rotation, for the firſt year of my ſerving; to have the collection of full three-fifths

of

of the rates, viz. twelve hundred pounds of the two thouſand, and with him the ſole application of this ſum remained, for his plan was to perſevere in the old ſyſtem, and to act independently of me. This conduct, and his being overwhelmed with misfortunes before his period of ſerving expired, involved the pariſh in great difficulties, and heavy pecuniary loſſes. It was impoſsible for me to have provided againſt this unfortunate event; but I am warranted in ſaying, both from the expenditure of the ſix alternate months in which I managed the poors rates for the firſt year of my ſerving, and from the expences of the laſt year, that my calculation was correct, and that ample funds were provided for every expence incurred in that year, if the cuſtom of the pariſh had not authorized a diviſion of the collections, and allowed the Overſeers to act independently of each other. My wiſh is to touch but ſlightly on a ſubject which may hurt the feelings of any one, and more eſpecially the unfortunate; I ſhall therefore cloſe my remarks on the financial tranſactions of the

firſt year, by ſtating that my confidence in the calculation I had made, was confirmed by it, and I determined to make another effort with the ſame rate, if I had the nomination of an Overſeer who would act in concert with me, in ſuch a manner as to prevent any of thoſe evils which muſt ariſe from doing the duty alternately, and holding ſeparate purſes.

I was now extremely fortunate in my choice. After collecting by advertiſement the total of all claims on the poors rates preceding Eaſter 1797, they were aſcertained, in the courſe of the ſummer, to amount to upwards of ſeven hundred and ninety pounds. This was a very large ſum, which could only be provided for by an extraordinary rate, without being at liberty to declare the purpoſe for which it was required (and to which, without an explanation, much odium would have been attached by artful miſrepreſentation) or by ſaving from the preſent rate. I determined on attempting the latter plan, and by improving the revenue from the earnings of the Poor, col-

collecting the rates more closely by the appointment of a collector, by contracting for all articles used in the house where it could be done, and by bringing every expence under a distinct head, shewing its amount, and the service performed by it; I was enabled to provide for the expences of the year from the usual rate, and leave a surplus of upwards of six hundred pounds, applied to the payment of old debts *. Of the sum expended, near two hundred pounds were paid to the School of Industry for the board and lodging of children, and for clothes purchased there. This sum fell into a channel from which much good flowed to the public; and this institution, if suffered to continue, must in the end relieve the rates considerably from the heavy expence of maintaining the Poor.

* This account of the building, finances and debts of the parish was the more necessary, as the rates had not been diminished while I served the office of Overseer; of which advantage was taken, by stating it generally as a proof that the expence did not admit of any reduction; and as parish business is now conducted, few have any other mode of judging than by what they pay in poor's rates.

Before I conclude this local hiſtory, I ſhall beg leave to ſtate ſhortly the change that has taken place in the ſituation of the Poor of this pariſh within the two laſt years. The addition to the building gave them an excellent work-room, 35 feet by 18, and two bed-rooms, which added conſiderably to the comfort of the inhabitants who were before exceedingly crouded, lying often four in a bed, and ſix beds ſtanding where there are now only two. The regular employment of the Poor ſeemed to add to their ſatisfaction and enjoyment, and the two-pence in the ſhilling which they got from their own earnings, put it in their power to indulge in a few trifling comforts which were not before within their reach. The removing the children to the School of Induſtry, though attended with ſome encreaſed expence, is of the firſt conſequence to ſociety, and muſt be highly beneficial to the pariſh in the end. The ſimplicity and publicity with which all the accompts have been kept, the manner of granting caſual relief, and the

degree

degree in which it has been given, are advantages which were found to be great, and the records of theſe tranſactions may prove a ſource of uſeful information to thoſe who do the buſineſs in future.

The houſe has been kept very clean, and generally white-waſhed twice a year by one of the Paupers. Thoſe gentlemen who were in the habit of ſeeing it before, and obſerving it now, can beſt teſtify the alteration that has taken place, and the ſatisfaction expreſſed by its inhabitants. The revenue and expenditure of this laſt year, prove, that at leaſt ſix hundred pounds have been ſaved from a rate that was not formerly equal to the expence, occaſioning a very heavy accumulating debt, which would have ſoon rendered a higher rate neceſſary. Theſe are facts clearly proved by the vouchers; in ſhort, a four ſhilling rate was the loweſt ſum talked of by the friends of the old ſyſtem; and it is now evident, that a two ſhilling rate would have been equal (if unincumbered with arrears of debt) to the annual expenditure for the Poor on the preſent

liberal,

liberal, I may ſay, extravagant plan, of feeding and clothing them, including the benefit given to the School of Induſtry in the labour of the pariſh children, as a mode of promoting an inſtitution ſo highly neceſſary and uſeful to the future welfare of the pariſh. I ſhould have likewiſe mentioned that the expence of raiſing the ſeamen for Government by the pariſh of Lewiſham, amounted to two hundred and thirty pounds, and was provided for by the uſual rates, without any additional collection for that purpoſe, ſimilar to what was made in moſt other places. There are very few of the deſerving poor who have not been made uſeful in the Workhouſe by teaching the children, attending the pickers of oakum, needlework, &c. for all which each has an allowance of about one ſhilling a week, which renders their ſituation much more comfortable than that of the idle and profligate. This diſtinction is too generally neglected, and moſt Workhouſes place all ranks and characters on exactly the ſame footing. The bills and vouchers of every ſort are lodged, for the information and ſatisfaction

tion of all concerned, in the hands of Mr. Parker, to whoſe attention and correctneſs the pariſh is much indebted, and I have great pleaſure in acknowledging it. I laboured under great difficulties from the want of ſuch papers, they having generally remained with the Overſeers after having them paſſed at the Bench *.

I cannot cloſe this hiſtory without ſtating one other advantage which I have in a peculiar degree derived from the laſt two years tranſactions, in the opportunity it has given me of knowing ſo many reſpectable characters in the pariſh, who have uniformly and invariably honoured me with their ſupport and confidence; and to whoſe diſintereſted zeal for the relief of the poor I owe the having been able to overcome the impotent, but active exertions of ſome obſcure individuals, in

* This practice throws a veil over tranſactions, that ought to be made as public and intelligible as poſſible. I mention it, becauſe they are, probably, in the hands of individuals, more from accident than deſign, and without their being aware of the diſadvantage ariſing from it.

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the form of anonymous publications, &c. ignorantly ſtiling Count Rumford a German deſpot, and attempting to involve the pariſh buſineſs in myſtery, confuſion, and jobs. The general intercourſe which took place at this period among the gentlemen, was occaſioned by a diſintereſtedneſs of conduct and uniformity of ſentiment with reſpect to the affairs of the Poor, and this happy event led in its conſequences to other meetings and plans which have redounded ſo highly to the honour and loyalty of the pariſh of Lewiſham *.

The diſcuſsion of this ſubject gives the beſt chance for unanimity among thoſe who mean well; and ſhould this object be ever ſacrificed for any other, I will

* In the ſpace of a few weeks, the inhabitants of this pariſh gave unqueſtionable proofs of their loyalty by a voluntary ſubſcription to the amount of ſeven hundred and forty pounds, which was paid into the Bank (independent of large ſums given by the noblemen and gentlemen, individually, for the ſame purpoſe, in town) and by raiſing the unparalleled ſum of upwards of one thouſand five hundred pounds to defray the expences of an Aſſociated Parochial Corps.

venture

venture to ſay, that we ſhall have great reaſon to lament it on public as well as private grounds.

If pariſh buſineſs were to be placed in the hands of perſons whoſe independence and reſpectability rendered their conduct and motives perfectly pure, we ſhould ſoon drive from us all bickerings, ſquabbling, and trick, kept alive by ſelfiſh views, which have generally in the end prevailed over the honourable exertions of individuals. It is proper to mention here, that when I accepted the office of Overſeer, I had perſuaded the pariſh to aboliſh the practice of eating and drinking at the expence of the Poor; but I am ſorry to ſay, that my going out of office was the ſignal for reſcinding that reſolution, and reſtoring pariſh dinners to their former ſtate. I cannot on this occaſion do better than quote the ſentiments of Mr. Ruggles (whom I have always looked up to as the firſt authority on what concerns the Poor) and offer my ſincere wiſhes that his predictions may not be realized

in the preſent inſtance. Mr. Ruggles ſays, " the total ſum falling under the column " of expence of entertainments, is cer- " tainly not much for the number of " pariſhes in England and Wales, but it " leads to the expences contained under " the heads of law-buſineſs, attendances " on magiſtrates, journeys, &c. Theſe " two columns form no inconſiderable " total. When a Veſtry, which ought " to meet and conclude the buſineſs of " their meeting in a part of the church " appropriated for that purpoſe, adjourns " to the neighbouring alehouſe, the trifle " which they expend of the poors rates " is not all; pariſh buſineſs is the object: " at a meeting of pariſhioners, having a " common topic to converſe about, ſome " ſoon become intereſted in defending " their opinions; more talk requires more " liquor, and their determinations are " made, not like thoſe of their German " anceſtors, *deliberant dum ſingere neſciunt: " conſtituunt dum errare non poſſunt*; but " they reverſe the matter; they deli- " berate while they are ſober, and de-

" termine

" termine when they are drunk; hence
" journies to magiſtrates, orders of re-
" moval on doubtful ſettlements, appeals
" to ſeſsions, thence to the King's Bench;
" hence attorney's bills, and enormous
" aſſeſſments. Was no order of veſtry
" good, or no pariſh officer to be indem-
" nified in expending the pariſh money
" in law conteſts, unleſs by an order of
" veſtry, ſigned before noon, in the pariſh
" church, after regular notice given, and
" no *adjournment* allowed, much of the
" article of expence would diſappear."

Feeling ſincerely intereſted as I do in what concerns the welfare of the Poor of this pariſh, I am extremely anxious for the ſucceſs of the School of Induſtry, as a very eſſential means of introducing good, moral, and induſtrious habits amongſt the riſing generation of the lower claſs; but I cannot at the ſame time conceal my apprehenſions reſpecting its fate, if ſpirited meaſures are not perſevered in by thoſe gentlemen who have hitherto patronized it. If the pariſh buſineſs

ever reverts to the old ſyſtem (of which I truſt there is little riſk at preſent) the School of Induſtry being a channel of communication between the worthy characters who ſupport it and the poor, muſt be deſtroyed. One of the many evils ariſing from the common method of managing the concerns of the poor is this, that no perſon of upright intentions can compromiſe or act in concert with thoſe who, loſing ſight of the relief of the really indigent, employ the rates in the payment of jobs, &c. Two parties, ſo oppoſite in their principles, cannot move together; and it will moſt frequently happen, that perſeverance from ſelf-intereſt will prevail over thoſe who eſpouſe the honourable cauſe, till Parliament ſhall interfere with effect, to promote the efforts of the well-diſpoſed, by rendering the miſapplication of the funds for the Poor, more liable to detection.

A CUR-

A CURSORY REVIEW

OF THE

SENTIMENTS OF DIFFERENT AUTHORS

ON THE

POOR LAWS.

AFTER having given an account of the practice of this individual pariſh, I ſhall proceed to ſtate, very generally, the heads of thoſe plans which have been recommended by different authors on the ſubject, and conclude with propoſing a ſyſtem for the management of the poor, which is dictated by the experience I have had in the buſineſs, joined to that information which I have collected from peruſing the publications of many authors, who have thown much light on the ſubject. My plan is meant to embrace two great objects, to improve the treatment of the real poor, and to render an honeſt and honourable account of the immenſe ſums ſo liberally given for the relief of

poverty, but ſo frequently perverted in a manner not only to defeat the end for which the money is raiſed, but to multiply the objects of charity by the encouragement of idleneſs and its concomitants, vice and profligacy.

I hope to make it appear, that my plan will be rather ſupported than contradicted by the greateſt part of what has been written on the ſubject of the Poor; though I ſhall probably have occaſion to lay more ſtreſs on ſome parts of it than has been done by others, and to propoſe what, as far as my information goes, has not occurred to former writers; though it ſeems the reſult of a perfect coincidence in opinion. I do not mean to carry my reader back to that period of obſcurity when little was known on the ſubject. The Act of the 43d of Elizabeth, which is the great corner ſtone of all the acts for the relief of the poor, has borne the teſt of time and experience; and if it were at this day in full force, even with its few defects, would form a much

a much better code of laws than what we now have; but the fact is, that its proviſion of materials and employment for the Poor, is almoſt totally neglected, which we owe in a great meaſure to the fluctuating appointment of Overſeers, and their attention being frequently directed to a very different application of the money.

Lord Hale, Sir Joſiah Child, and others who have written on this ſubject before the preſent day, agree in pointing out the neceſsity of employing the Poor, and complain of the little attention paid to that part of the 43d of Elizabeth, which directs the Overſeers to furniſh materials, and find employment for thoſe who are able to work. Sir Joſiah preſſes this ſo much as to ſay, that "Whether it turns "to preſent profit or not, is not much "material; the great buſineſs of the na- "tion being firſt to keep the Poor from "begging and ſtarving, and inuring ſuch "as are able, to labour and diſcipline, "that they may be hereafter uſeful

" members to the kingdom." I agree with Mr. Ruggles in thinking this maxim deſerves to be written in letters of gold in all workhouſes. Sir Joſiah thinks, that the great fault lies in every pariſh being left to maintain its own poor. Though I cannot aſcribe all the evil to this cauſe, I can ſee great advantages from uniting ſeveral ſmall pariſhes, for the purpoſe of better managing their poor by an eſtabliſhment that cannot be afforded on a ſmall ſcale, and more eſpecially that deſcription of poor who are likely, by their bad habits and vices, to contaminate the riſing generation. All our workhouſes, but perhaps more eſpecially thoſe in the vicinity of London, contain many ſuch characters, and I am extremely deſirous to ſee them in a more iſolated ſituation, and put out of the way of doing any miſchief by their example. I think theſe objects require a ſort of diſcipline, though not harſh, yet very different from what we would wiſh to ſee exerciſed over the deſerving Poor, who, when forced in the

decline

decline of life into a workhouſe, ſhould receive kind and indulgent treatment.

Sir William Young, in a letter addreſſed to Mr. Pitt, on the ſubject of the poor, ſays; "An aſylum for helpleſs and ſo-"litary age, and a ſchool of induſtry for "forſaken children, or for children who "may voluntarily reſort thither, or be "ſent by their parents, are the two only "proper wards of a poor houſe; any other "ſhould be called by its right name—*a* "*houſe of correction.*" This judicious remark ſhould never be loſt ſight of by thoſe who manage the concerns of the poor; and the ſeparation ſo ſtrongly recommended is, in my opinion, very practicable, though I am more inclined to ſend the undeſerving poor to a houſe of induſtry and reform, than to a houſe of correction, which ſeldom or never poſſeſſes any of theſe qualities.

We are likewiſe indebted to Sir William Young for what has paſſed into a law to prevent vexatious removals, the cruelty and

and impolicy of which, cannot be too much condemned. The laws of ſettlements, in the 13th and 14th of Charles the Second, abridged the liberty of the ſubject very much, and rendered the removal of a poor family from one part of the country to another, a matter of great difficulty. I cannot help deprecating all reſtraining laws reſpecting ſettlements,—I truſt and hope they are not frequently acted on. While I was in office I never ſuffered the removal of a Pauper, becauſe I apprehended he might become a burthen to the pariſh; nor did I ever throw a difficulty in the way of a ſettler from another pariſh. I was a determined advocate for perfect freedom in all this, as the faireſt thing to the individual, and giving the beſt chance to the kingdom at large, of diminiſhing the number of Poor, by giving every one the liberty of looking out for employment where he can beſt find it.

I will not trouble my reader with the opinions of all who have written on the

ſubject of the poor, from the time of Sir Joſiah Child, to the period of Mr. Gilbert's eſpouſing their cauſe; but only ſtate in general they agree in lamenting the effects of the exiſting ſyſtem, and ſtrongly recommend induſtry, employment, and ſelection of objects, with permanency in the appointment of Overſeers, as the beſt means of putting the whole on a proper footing. Mr. Gilbert begins by ſtating, "Idleneſs, profligacy, and a relaxation of "the laws, as undoubtedly the cauſes of "the evils." The two firſt are, in my opinion, more the effect than the cauſe of the evil. Few gentlemen have been ſo indefatigable in the ſervice of the poor, as Mr. Gilbert, and his numerous publications on that ſubject, contain many valuable remarks which may be highly ſerviceable in forming a leſs complicated plan than what he had in view. Mr. Gilbert ſays, that "labour and induſtry, under "a vigorous and ſpirited execution of the "laws, with ſome few amendments, muſt "be the remedy." On the ſubject of workhouſes, he ſays, "Workhouſes are "gene-

" generally inhabited by all ſorts of per-
" ſons; old, young, ſickly, diſeaſed, and
" alſo the diſſolute and profligate, and
" many of them without employment.
" Hence ariſe confuſion, diſorder, and
" diſtreſſes, not eaſily to be deſcribed. I
" have long thought it a great defect in
" the management of the common work-
" houſes, that all deſcriptions of poor per-
" ſons ſhould be ſent thither; when, for
" the moſt part they are very ill-accom-
" modated. The clamorous and diſor-
" derly always make confuſion: they
" diſturb the quiet of the old and infirm,
" and generally procure and conſume the
" beſt proviſions." This remark ſhows a perfect knowledge of the characters of the inhabitants of a workhouſe, and the deſcription would have been complete, if he had added, that the example of the diſorderly did likewiſe great miſchief to the younger, and gave diſguſt to the worthy part of that ſociety. One of Mr. Gilbert's plans was, to hire out the diſorderly, or ſend them to hard labour in the houſe of correction, and to keep the

younger

younger part out of the houſe under proper inſpection, till they were of age to go apprentices. I have frequently ſolicited all ranks in the pariſh to employ thoſe who were more able than willing to work, but experience convinces me of the difficulty of hiring out the worthleſs part of the poor, and getting people who will take the trouble of keeping them employed; and if ſo employed, they muſt be fed and lodged in the workhouſe, to the great diſturbance of the other inhabitants. The plan of ſending them to the houſe of correction is ſeldom or never adopted, there is too much apparent ſeverity in it. Poverty will always excite ſome degree of compaſsion, and the Overſeer of the day does not think of reforming the bad, but of getting through his duty without the odium of harſhneſs. We had ſeveral who came into the Workhouſe to ſpend the winter in preference to the being employed on reduced wages by the farmers, but I always contrived to find ſome employment for them, which ſent them out of the houſe much earlier

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in the ſpring than they would have otherwiſe gone, and certainly more capable of doing their duty than if they had been idle in the houſe all that time.

The following judicious remark of Mr. Gilbert's muſt meet with the hearty aſſent of all who think on the ſubject. He ſays, "As much depends on the good diſpoſition and ability of the Overſeer for the "execution of the proviſions of this bill, "(meaning his own) it is to be lamented "that the perſons generally appointed to "that office are ſo unequal to the truſt. "Great part of the diſtreſſes of the poor "and of the profuſion of expence ariſes "from this cauſe. Some of theſe pariſh "officers are too apt to gratify themſelves "and their favourites, and to neglect the "more deſerving objects in the application of pariſh money." Mr. G. proceeds and ſays, "By what means this "grievance can be moſt properly cured "is a matter of great importance, and "deſerves very ſerious conſideration. It is "a misfortune that, in ſome pariſhes there

" are no fit perſons to be found for the
" purpoſe, and it will be diſagreeable to
" bring ſtrangers into that office."

Mr. Gilbert's plan to obviate theſe difficulties was, for the veſtry, (if they thought fit) to nominate a .perſon to be guardian of the poor, and to ſupply the place of the Churchwardens and Overſeers in all reſpects, except making the rates, collecting and paying the money. I would adviſe ſuch a guardian to be very careful how he contracted debts, if the purſe of the pariſh was in the hands of the Overſeer, but even this plan was meant to be optional, and if attempted would occaſion much parochial ſquabbling. Mr. Gilbert, with much humanity and attention to the intereſts of the poor, laments the improper application and waſte of large ſums from charitable bequeſts, &c. which are perverted and forced into other channels.

Theſe charitable donations in land, &c. are immenſe, and if the intentions of the donors

donors were more ſacredly attended to, would increaſe every year; but till pariſh buſineſs paſſes into other hands, will continue to be managed as at preſent. If the arrangement which I have to propoſe ſhould take place, this fund ſhould be conſolidated with the Poors-rates, employing moſt ſcrupulouſly what has been ſpecifically appropriated by the donor in the manner directed, and applying the reſt to the relief of the poor. I am ſanguine enough to think that this fund would ſoon be enough for every charitable purpoſe, for its amount in my opinion exceeds every calculation I have ſeen on the ſubject.

* Mr. Gilbert's bill propoſes the union of pariſhes, but is liable to this objection, that the expence of each does not depend on its own management, but on the general diſpoſition of the whole. As this appears

* At the moment of writing theſe lines, I find we have to deplore the loſs of this worthy member of ſociety, and no leſs valued friend in private life.

to

to me to be an error which has crept into the regulations of many, if not all, of the incorporated parishes; I must beg leave to say a few words on the subject. The expence of maintaining these houses is paid, according to a scale calculated when they were founded, and has no relation to the present expence incurred for each parish. There is, therefore, no temptation, on the part of the individual parish, to relieve the house by keeping Paupers out of it, or to exercise any degree of economy; but if each parish paid to the establishment, in proportion to the numbers they sent, it would prevent a disposition to overload the house, which is frequently a great injury to the objects sent, and always to the public. I believe, Overseers are sometimes so jealous of not spending their proportion of the general fund, in casualties, &c. that many improper applications are made, to the weekly committee of incorporated houses, on the ground of others receiving more. All this might be easily remedied; by

charging each pariſh with the maintenance of its own Poor in the houſe, by a bill made out for the time they are in it, and the caſual expence ſhould certainly be drawn from their own fund. In the preſent caſe there is a general purſe for the whole, which occaſions a ſcramble about what pariſh ſhall ſpend the moſt of it, either by preſsing applications on the committee for crowding the houſe, or in demands for large caſual expences. I have long admired the plan of houſes of induſtry, as adopted in Norfolk, Suffolk, &c. and having viſited ſeveral of them, I have been aſtoniſhed at the improvement, in the comfort, and happineſs, of the poor therein. There is little wanting, in my opinion, to make them perfect, but that ſtimulus to economy in the ſeparate pariſhes, which muſt ariſe from their ſpending their own money, and not that of the general body. If one pariſh finds their proportion of rates diminiſhed by this arrangement, and another increaſed by the want of it, their attention will ſoon

ſoon be drawn to the beſt method of managing, whereas, at preſent, there is often diſcovered an anxiety to incur expence, from an apprehenſion that it will be ſpent by ſome other pariſh, if *they* do not lay it out. It appears that the ſame idea has occurred to Sir F. W. Eden, in his valuable hiſtory of the Poor, for he ſays, "That "few incorporations of pariſhes have taken "place under the act, is not to be won-"dered at, when it is conſidered, that al-"though it empowers the pariſhes uniting "to borrow money on the ſecurity of the "poors rates, it directs, that the perſons "ſent to the poor houſe ſhall be main-"tained at the general expence of the "pariſhes uniting." This certainly deſtroys every advantage from individual economy, and ſubjects the beſt managed pariſh to bear its ſhare of any extraordinary expence from the extravagance of another. Let us apply this caſe in common life, and ſuppoſe that a number of families agree to furniſh a fund for their general expences: if the extravagance of

one, muſt be made up by the economy and good management of the other, where would be the temptation to exerciſe that economy which would be otherwiſe practiſed. As ſome of the incorporated houſes of induſtry may have occaſion to apply to parliament, for an alteration in their act, I would recommend to their ſerious conſideration, the advantage that might be derived from each pariſh being called upon for the exact ſum actually ſpent by it; and not ſuffer the extravagance of one, to fall as a load on the other. I will venture to ſay, that if this is done, the poor will not be hurried into the houſe, or put on the liſt for relief, with ſo little attention as they ſometimes are at preſent.

Mr. Gilbert's plan was to continue the Overſeer as Treaſurer, to which I ſhall have occaſion to offer many objections. It is, I believe, a fair and general principle, in all matters of expence, that there ſhould be an intervening check between the receipt and payment of money; but more of this afterwards. Mr. Gilbert recommends

commends in the ſtrongeſt manner, the encouragement of friendly ſocieties. It is impoſsible not to join with him moſt heartily in this. Great good has been done by them, and they may be further employed, as powerful engines, to promote the happineſs of the lower orders, by giving them a ſpirit of independence, and exciting a horror at the idea of leaving themſelves with the only reſource of a workhouſe in their old age, when they have it in their power to be enrolled (at a trifling expence) as annuitants, on a fund of their own ſupporting. An alteration in the management of the concerns of the poor, will produce, in addition to many other advantages, a co-operation in promoting friendly ſocieties, and, in ſhort, in promoting generally the good of the lower orders in ſociety. I am afraid Mr. Gilbert ſpeaks too ſanguinely of the profits ariſing from the labour of the poor. Their labour, when compared with their numbers, will never be productive, but the great advantage of employing them proceeds from the good habits that may

be acquired by many, and the not holding out an idle aſylum in a workhouſe to the worthleſs. Mr. Gilbert's publication, entitled, "Conſiderations on the Bills for the "Better Relief and Employment of the "Poor," contains many juſt and valuable remarks on the office of Overſeers, and paints in ſtrong colours, the abſurdity of the appointment. I cannot do better than give his ſentiments on this ſubject, in his own words—He ſays, "The Overſeers are "entruſted with the making of rates and "aſſeſſments for raiſing money to main-"tain and employ the poor; they inſpect "and ſuperintend the Workhouſe, and in "ſhort, take upon them the whole go-"vernment of the poor. It ſhould ſeem "that much of the good or bad in the "execution of this ſyſtem, muſt, in the "nature of the thing, depend upon the "perſons who fill this office; and yet "this office is ſo conſtituted and diſpoſed, "that there appears every proſpect of its "being ill executed, and hardly a "chance of its being properly filled. "Overſeers are annually appointed by

"juſtices

" juſtices of the peace, according to a
" ſort of rotation among the ſubſtantial
" houſeholders, without any regard to
" the qualification of the perſon nomi-
" nated. Pariſh offices are proverbially
" burthens on thoſe who are ſo unfortu-
" nate as to be liable to them. Imagine
" then, an honeſt tradeſman or farmer,
" who is wholly occupied with his own
" concerns, appointed againſt his will to
" this office; can it be expected that he
" would, for a whole year, ſacrifice his
" private affairs in order to give up his
" attention to thoſe of the pariſh, which
" bring him neither profit nor honour?
" Suppoſe a perſon who was not engaged
" in any private occupation, and who
" would readily beſtow his pains and time
" on pariſh affairs; theſe, like other em-
" ployments, require experience and
" practice before they can be underſtood;
" and by the time an Overſeer knows his
" duty, his year is expired and he is out
" of office. If any one was to be aſked,
" whether in a large concern of his own;
" to ſuperintend and overſee a manufac-

" tory, or the like, he would prefer a
" perſon diſtracted with his own affairs,
" as the former of theſe perſons; or,
" when he had fortunately got a diligent
" and attentive officer he would change
" him every year; he would hardly think
" you meant to put a ſerious queſ-
" tion. And yet this is the plan upon
" which ſo extenſive a concern as that
" of the Poor is now managed. In theſe
" two deſcriptions of perſons, I have
" choſen favourable inſtances; a pariſh is
" fortunate when it has Overſeers that do
" neither good nor harm, or ſuch as at-
" tempt, though feebly, to do good. I
" am afraid many of theſe officers are
" ſuch as are ſtudious to obtain theſe ſitu-
" ations, in order to convert them to their
" own advantage or that of their friends.
" The feeding and clothing of the Poor
" is a ſource of great patronage; the oc-
" caſional buildings and repairs, the ap-
" pointing inferior officers and retainers
" about the poor houſe, not to mention
" the petty importance which ſome think
" they derive from this office, are in po-

" pulous

" pulous places, circumſtances of great " moment, with the deſcription of per- " ſons of whom we are ſpeaking. When " ſuch perſons are Overſeers, I will not " deny they may diſcharge their office " with diligence, and even with know- " ledge (for ſuch people ſeldom want " either), but it is eaſily conceived whe- " ther the pariſh will be gainers by the " adminiſtration of affairs in ſuch hands." Mr. Gilbert, in another part of the ſame publication, ſpeaking of his plan, ſays, " The outline may not preciſely agree " with any that have been hitherto pro- " poſed; but it aims equally with them, " at the grand principle of *union*, *ſuper-* " *intendance*, *controul*, and *permanency of* " *office*, which is ſuppoſed to be the de- " ciſive remedy for the preſent defects in " the poor laws."

The indefatigable and honourable exertions of Mr. Gilbert, ſucceeded in paſſing two bills in parliament, one for rendering more effectual the laws in being, relative to Houſes of Correction, and the other

other for the better relief and employment of the Poor, and for authorizing two or more pariſhes to unite if they pleaſed, for the purpoſe of maintaining their Poor. The firſt bill has done good, but a houſe of correction is not often reſorted to by pariſh officers, for the reaſon I gave before, and I believe few pariſhes have availed themſelves of the power of uniting for the reaſon mentioned by Sir F. W. Eden. Mr. Gilbert's bill, for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor, publiſhed in 1786, diſplays great knowledge of the defect in the mode of managing the concerns of the Poor, though, in my opinion, his plan of county commiſsioners, diſtrict committee, diſtrict agent, Overſeers, &c. would have led to much confuſion and diſguſt, throwing ultimately the whole concern into the hands of the Overſeer, who was ſtill left with the power of aſſeſſing, collecting, and diſburſing, which places him out of the reach of all effectual controul, as I ſhall have occaſion to ſtate hereafter.

Mr.

Mr. Gilbert laments that a fit perſon is not to be found at all times, to manage the concerns of the Poor, and as his plan does not ſeparate the deliberative from the executive part of that duty, I am convinced that his fears are well grounded. I believe the difficulty of perſuading gentlemen to accept the office of juſtices of the peace, if part of their duty was to execute ſummonſes, and perſonally attend on the apprehenſion of culprits, would be as great as that of prevailing on gentlemen to accept the office of Overſeer on the preſent ſyſtem.

We have many inſtances of attempts at reforming the concerns and bettering the condition of the Poor, by independent gentlemen, and ſuch efforts will generally meet with the liberal co-operation of the reſpectable part of ſociety; but the intrigues of intereſted individuals, and the preſent laws, will be found to act as great checks in the execution of a permanent ſyſtem, without the aid of parliament.

I truſt

I truſt that I may be excuſed from going into a detail of all that has been propoſed for the relief of the poor, by Lord Hilſborough, Mr. Alcock, Sir Richard Lloyd, &c. the more eſpecially as the whole that has been written on the ſubject may really be ſummed up in the following words. All acknowledge the defects of the preſent ſyſtem, deprecate the temporary appointment of Overſeers, and agree generally that the rates, when miſapplied by being given to unworthy objects, do much miſchief by encreaſing idleneſs and wretchedneſs. Mr. Alcock ſays, " That the poor laws tend to de-
" ſtroy charity, eſpecially when the legal
" exaction is ſo very high that no leſs a
" ſum than three miliions yearly is raiſed
" at a medium for this purpoſe, which is
" equal to a land tax at ſix ſhillings in
" the pound, add to this, that the ſhame-
" leſs, the impudent, and leaſt deſerving,
" run away with this vaſt ſum, while the
" modeſt, the baſhful, and really indigent,
" are ſuffered to languiſh in the moſt
" diſtreſsing circumſtances imaginable."

After

After Mr. Gilbert's laſt bill was loſt in the houſe of peers, Sir William Young brought forward a bill for the amendment of the poor laws, in which great knowledge and judgment reſpecting the ſituation of the Poor are diſcovered. He very humanely propoſes that no Pauper ſhould be removed till actually chargeable, that no publican ſhould be an Overſeer, that Overſeer's accounts ſhould be paſſed twice a year, that there ſhould be a regiſter of all reliefs, and the book produced at the Bench. It muſt, however, be conſidered as a defect in this plan, that the Overſeer is left with nearly all the power he had before, and remains the purſe-bearer of the pariſh, which muſt in general render all other checks nugatory. I was ſorry to obſerve in a bill ſo wiſely and humanely framed, an attempt to fix the rate of wages, and compel pariſhioners to employ and pay thoſe who could not find work. Such ſervices would have been very ill performed on the part of the Pauper, and the load to the pariſhioner would have been very heavy indeed. I

have

have read, with much pleaſure, a letter of Sir William Young's to Mr. Pitt, in which are diſcernible ſtrong marks of feeling and humanity in what concerns the Poor; but if I thought the preſent method of managing them was to be continued, I ſhould be very deſirous of offering ſome objections to his unqualified manner of condemning all pariſh workhouſes, and the farming them.

If the poor laws were adminiſtered by diſintereſted perſons, and their comforts ſupplied without any view to jobs, I ſhould certainly think, with Sir William Young, that they ought not to be fed and clothed by contract; but I do believe, that under the preſent management, the Poor have a better chance of being well provided by contract, if a fixed table of diet is agreed on, open to complaints from the Poor, and the contract to be annulled on one months notice, with other reſtraining clauſes. I cannot ſee why the Poor are more likely to be hurried into a houſe ſupplied by contract, than to any other.

The

The Overſeer has done with all advantage from a caſual ſupply of money, clothes, &c. when the Pauper goes into the houſe; and, with a fair contract, he cannot have any intereſt in keeping him there. The contractor ſhould not have the power of receiving a Pauper, but with an order from the Overſeer; who, having no emolument from the money paid to the contractor, has not, therefore, any intereſt in ſwelling that item of expence. It would not be ſo, if he were appointed to furniſh every article to the workhouſe. I am likewiſe convinced, that a workhouſe has a better chance of being well provided by a contractor, than an annual Overſeer, becauſe the contractor muſt endeavour to preſerve his character in the line which gives him a living. He is liable to be checked and controuled by the Overſeers and the pariſh, if there is any thing flagrant in his treatment of the Poor. The Overſeer looks only to the termination of his compulſory duty, and perhaps to gain ſome advantage, to make up to his family for the loſs he has ſuſtained in performing it.

it. I believe, likewiſe, that the complaints of Paupers againſt a contractor are more likely to be heard and attended to, than thoſe againſt an Overſeer. I know that Poors rates have been conſiderably reduced in many places by farming, in conſequence of its ſimplifying the expence; but this is an inferior conſideration, if the worthy Poor are leſs comfortable. My objection to farming the Poor, ariſes from its being for the intereſt of the contractor to *continue* in the houſe, thoſe eſpecially who are beſt able to work. The general declamation againſt ſupplying them with food, &c. by contract, applies equally to all other inſtitutions for charitable purpoſes, to priſons, and to all other caſes in which it is very common. I am, therefore, obliged to differ, in this inſtance, from the very high and reſpectable authority above-mentioned; but ſubſcribe to the following humane remark on the misfortunes of families entering a workhouſe, which will, I truſt, point out the propriety of affording relief to large indigent families, in order to keep them

from ſuch ſcenes. " Break up family,
" and the link is taken away which di-
" rects and holds too every further obliga-
" tion in ſociety; put the wife in the
" woman's ward of a workhouſe, the
" children in another; wean the huſband
" and father from the relative affections,
" he will fly from the roof, and a robber
" is let looſe on the wide world, and an
" enemy created to the ſtate. Let the
" word home be appropriated to as many
" as the lot of life can admit to it, under
" human inſtitution; if laws cannot give
" it, let them not unduly wreſt what
" they cannot beſtow. Leſſening the
" number of rural cottages, we diminiſh
" the number of the beſt and moſt faith-
" ful ſubjects of the ſtate; but we do
" more and worſe, in filling workhouſes;
" we are manning, as it were, ſo many
" diſaffected garriſons, the inmates of
" which, on the firſt violence of popular
" commotion that occaſions and preju-
" dices may create, will be let looſe on
" the country, from a regard to which
" they have been ſo cruelly and forcibly

" weaned. They have been left no place " of endearment, no point of home where " to fix, and whence to ſtretch the com- " paſs of regard to the circle of family, " to that of neighbourhood, to pariſh, to " county, and till it reaches the periphery " of the common wealth, and becomes a " national affection, and patriotic ſup- " port." The above picture bears a greater reſemblance to the objects in a common workhouſe, than the inhabitants of any of the incorporated houſes of induſtry that I have viſited.

The ſuggeſtions of the ſame writer have, probably, given riſe to a regulation which puts it out of the power of an Overſeer to tear a mother from its child; and the bill for friendly ſocieties is evidently founded on what he publiſhed many years ago. It may, therefore, be fairly ſaid, that few have ſerved the cauſe of the Poor more effectually than Sir William Young. He pleads with much energy and humanity, againſt the practice of removing the ſick to a workhouſe, ſeparating

parating the family of a cottager, or apprehending thoſe who may be deemed on the brink of requiring parochial aid. He has in fact pointed out moſt ably the many evils that attend the preſent ſyſtem of managing the Poor, and aſcribes them to the proper cauſe; but he has not furniſhed us with a remedy for all this miſchief. Mr. Vaucouver's enquiry into the cauſes and production of poverty, contains much ingenious theory on the ſubject, but theory and practice are frequently at variance in what relates to the management of the Poor, and where we have practice to guide us, I would not place great dependence on theory. Mr. Vaucouver goes into a calculation of what the labourer ſuffers by not working on Sunday. The loſs of the ſabbath does not apply to the labourer only, and the preſumption is, that it was originally conſidered in his wages for the other ſix days, the produce of which was, of courſe, to maintain his family for the ſeven. The preſent ſtate of Europe muſt have convinced us of the advantage of *keeping the ſabbath day holy.*

Mr. Vancouver concludes, however, "that "the labourer loſes one ſeventh of his "property, and that himſelf and family "would be deſtitute one-ſeventh of every "year, were he not to endeavour, by "perhaps unnatural exertions, to make "up the deficiency." Without diſcuſſing this argument, I muſt avow my unqualified objection to every attempt at regulating wages by any ſtandard whatever. Labour will find its value, like every thing elſe, and all endeavours to control or increaſe it may do much miſchief, and cannot do good. I could give many inſtances of the preſent rate of wages in this part of the country, (ſay twelve ſhillings a week), being ſufficient, with prudence and economy, for the maintenance of a large family; and in manufacturing towns, ſuch as Birmingham and Mancheſter, we are told that mechanics can earn two and three guineas a week, while their children are employed in other branches of manufacture; but how ſtands the fact with reſpect to their comforts and the Poors rates. Mr. Wood, in a letter addreſſed

dreſſed to Sir William Pultney, on the ſubject of Mr. Pitt's Bill, ſays; "I have "here, Sir, a fact to ſtate, from authen- "tic documents, that muſt impreſs every "thinking mind with feelings I am una- "ble to deſcribe. In the year 1787, the "expenditure at Birmingham, for the "ſupport of the poor, was eleven thou- "ſand one hundred and thirty-two "pounds ſixteen ſhillings and nine pence "half-penny. Conſiderable as this muſt "be deemed, there has been a pro- "greſsive increaſe, and the laſt year "(1796) it was advanced to twenty-four "thouſand and fifty pounds fourteen "ſhillings and three half-pence. The "total amount of this expenditure, in "ten ſucceſsive years, for the town of "Birmingham only, came to one hun- "dred and ſixty-two thouſand four hun- "dred and eighty-one pounds three ſhil- "lings and two-pence; and, in this ſhort "ſpace, the annual expenditure was more "than doubled."

We have proof here, from experience, that high wages do not diminiſh poverty; my practice confirms me in this opinion. Mr. Vaucouver gives a valuable ſtatement of the annual receipts and diſburſements of the court of guardians of the city of Norwich, for ten years, by which it appears, that the average expence of maintaining the Poor there was two ſhillings and five pence per week, deducting their earnings; but the ſtatement ſhows an annual decreaſe in the number of their Poor, and in their expence. This is ſo different from the practice of moſt pariſhes, and ſhows, at the end of a few years, ſuch a decided advantage over the pariſh which increaſes its expence annually, as to deſerve particular notice. That plan which progreſsively decreaſes the number of Poor, and diminiſhes the rate, will (when contraſted at the end of a few years with the preſent general ſyſtem), ſhow a very wide difference indeed. Before the year 1795, when bread was ſo very dear, the wages of the labourer, in this part of the country,

country, were ten ſhillings a week; they then roſe to twelve; and if the articles of life were as cheap, or cheaper, than they had been, many years ago, wages would not fall back, ſo that this advantage is gained by the labourer, and will be kept by him; and if bread ſhould advance again, in its price, we ſhould have a farther riſe in wages. I do not ſtate this from any regret of its being ſo, very far from it, but merely to ſhow that the price of labour will find its level, and rather favour the labourer than otherwiſe.

We have an account of the Shrewſbury Houſe of Induſtry publiſhed by Mr. Wood, who has been long an active director of that inſtitution. This very ſenſible and diſtinct narrative ſhould be generally peruſed, it deſcribes the management of one of the beſt conducted Houſes of Induſtry in the kingdom, and Mr. Wood ſhews a perfect knowledge of thoſe characters who generally apply for pariſh relief. I beg leave to quote him in confirmation of my own opinion on this ſubject. He ſays,

" It is too evident that while the Poor are
" ſupported in idleneſs, they will be
" averſe to labour; and the indolence
" thus encouraged, is the fruitful parent
" of that debauchery and depravity, and
" that conſequent wretchedneſs and mi-
" ſery which have made ſo fatal a pro-
" greſs among the lower orders of the
" community. Every caution will be re-
" laxed, and every profligacy indulged,
" by men ſo diſpoſed, from the conſidera-
" tion that neither themſelves or their
" families can ever ſtarve. And whilſt
" families thus neglected by thoſe who
" ought to provide for them, are thrown
" upon the public, the children in thoſe
" families are left expoſed to the worſt
" examples. Brought up among the *vi-*
" *cious and profligate*, they muſt inevita-
" bly imbibe the contagion. Lying is the
" firſt leſſon of their tongues, and theft
" too often the firſt exerciſe of their
" hands; every object they ſee is at war
" with decency, and every impreſſion
" they receive is a vice. Thus, inſtead of
" becoming, as they grow up, uſeful

" mem-

" members of ſociety, they add to the
" maſs of thoſe who are its burden and
" peſt; and the evil thus increaſing in a
" compound ratio, threatens our country
" with calamities too ſhocking to be de-
" ſcribed. Every effort made to redreſs
" theſe diſorders by *pariſh officers* has
" proved abortive. The object is too
" large for their graſp. It is neceſſary
" the attempt ſhould be made upon a
" wider ſcale, with fuller powers, and
" upon a regular *permanent* plan. To fur-
" niſh employment for the Poor and
" compel them to earn their own ſupport,
" has been found impracticable in Pariſh
" Workhouſes, under the direction and
" management of thoſe officers who are
" *annually* choſen and *annually* removed.
" Their own occupations afford them not
" ſufficient leiſure for that regular attend-
" ance and attention which this would
" require when conducted by them
" alone. Nor could the ſtill more impor-
" tant object of training up the children
" of the Poor to habits of induſtry and
" virtue be here attained. In theſe

" Workhouſes as well as in their private
" dwellings, they are incorporated with
" the *abandoned* and *depraved*; and from
" the ſame cauſe the ſame effect will be
" invariably produced; which muſt con-
" tinue to be the caſe until they are regu-
" larly claſſed, and an *abſolute ſeparation*
" effected. Here likewiſe more care and
" attention are neceſſary than are gene-
" rally to be expected from parochial of-
" ficers; and in both caſes the annual
" change of theſe officers commonly pro-
" duces an *annual* change of plan. New
" meaſures are adopted, often founded in
" caprice, ſometimes in ſelf intereſt, and
" almoſt always ending in miſcarriage and
" diſappointment; which, together with
" the additional charge attending theſe
" experiments, operates as a diſcourage-
" ment to all future efforts."

Mr. Wood is an able advocate for ſuch an inſtitution as the Shrewſbury Houſe of Induſtry, and proves indeed that it approaches nearer to perfection than almoſt any of the ſort. I am however induced to

think that the office of Overſeers is not a *permanent* appointment even there, but that their powers are much curtailed, and that a treaſurer is appointed to receive the rates, ſo that there is not likely to be ſo much ſquabbling and intrigue for the office, as when the purſe of the pariſh is in their hands. This Houſe of Induſtry has reduced the rates one-third, and increaſed the comforts of the Poor very conſiderably. I am aware with Mr. Wood of the danger from impoſition in granting penſions and caſual relief, but I am ſtill convinced that there are ſituations in which it ought to be done, and if ever the deliberative part of that duty is in the hands of reſpectable perſons, holding permanent appointments, they will have the means of detecting fraud beyond what the preſent fluctuating Overſeer has. I had occaſion to obſerve that my fixing a regular period for granting relief, &c. had furniſhed an argument againſt my humanity. A ſyſtem of order and arrangement is neceſſary in all concerns, and to ſhew how little occaſion there was for that unſeaſonable attend-

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ance at all hours on the Poor of our pariſh, I ſhall quote one or two of the regulations for the Shrewſbury Houſe of Induſtry, where the buſineſs of ſix populous pariſhes is tranſacted.

Bye law III. "That the officers do "not defray any lying-in expences, or "relieve any *pauper whatſoever*, but by "order of the *weekly* court, except in caſe "of ſudden emergency, and then *only* "with the conſent of Three Directors.

IV. "That they do not order or engage "to defray the expence of any coffin or "other funeral charges, without the "*written conſent* of Three Directors.

XIV. "That no Pauper whatſoever "be admitted into the houſe without an "order of the *weekly* court, or in caſe "of emergency, a writen order ſigned by "Three Directors."

Mr.

Mr. Jones's publication on the prevention of poverty by beneficial clubs, ſhows much knowledge and information reſpecting the ſtate of our Poor, and the cauſes of their great poverty. I am convinced with him, if beneficial clubs were aided by the pariſh purſe, that much good might be done by them, but all this muſt be on the ſuppoſition of parochial concerns paſsing into the hands of diſintereſted people. I am clearly of opinion that the legiſlature ſhould not meddle with the detail of beneficial clubs, or friendly ſocieties. They are in general very well regulated, and the members have a pride in controuling the concern themſelves.

Mr. Jones deſcribes, in ſtrong terms, the miſerable and impriſoned ſtate of workhouſes. The remark I hope does not apply to all workhouſes, which ought to be a comfortable retreat to ſome who inhabit them, though a place of employment and reſtraint to others. It is rather fortunate, in ſome reſpects, that workhouſes

houſes are conſidered in an ignominious light by many of the lower claſs, for I believe their table of diet is in general much fuller and better than in the cottage; ſo that according to the preſent indiſcriminate and injudicious mode of admitting all deſcriptions of people into a workhouſe, if many were not prevented by a ſenſe of ſhame from demanding that relief, half the pariſh would ſpend their winter there.

Mr. Ruggles has given the public, in a ſeries of letters, a very valuable hiſtory of the Poor, full of important information, and containing ample proof of the defect of the preſent ſyſtem, and the neceſsity of a complete alteration in the method of managing them. He gives us the reſult of an experiment which he made in his own pariſh with a School of Induſtry, on a very ſmall ſcale; and it appears that, with five or ſix pounds employed as a capital, he found the means of teaching ſix boys and ſix girls to ſpin and knit, whoſe collected earnings, after returning the

the capital, amounted to upwards of three pounds. The advantage of acquiring habits of induſtry is evidently of more conſequence than the profits, but if ſuch ſchools were generally adopted as practiſed by Mr. Ruggles, in a very limited degree, or as in the pariſh of Lewiſham, I am convinced that we ſhould do important ſervices to the public, and ſupply the lower claſs of people with their different articles of dreſs at a much eaſier rate than that to which they have hitherto been accuſtomed.

Mr. Ruggles points out, in forcible terms, the great miſchief that may be done by enforcing the laws which reſtrain the removal of manufacturers and labourers from one pariſh to another; and any regulation, ſhort of perfect freedom in all this, muſt be one cauſe of increaſed poverty.

He reprobates, in ſtrong language, the practice of feaſting at the expence of the Poor, and ſtates the evil conſequences of

ſuch

ſuch alehouſe meetings, in the encouragement of law conteſts, appeals to ſeſsions, vexatious removals, &c. The ſame author obſerves, with great propriety, that Sunday Schools will produce few good effects, if the morals and habits of the children are neglected for the other ſix days, ſo that unleſs Sunday admonition is combined with attention to induſtry and good habits for the reſt of the week, much good is not to be expected from it. The miſchief done by alehouſes is well deſcribed, but I fear we cannot expect any effectual remedy for that evil at preſent.

Mr. Ruggles's calculations and data on the increaſed and increaſing Poors rates are very curious and intereſting, and when contraſted with the good done by the eſtabliſhment of Houſes of Induſtry, both with reſpect to improving the comforts of the Poor, and keeping down the rates, it muſt, at firſt view, of the compariſon, appear aſtoniſhing that they have not been more generally adopted. He ſays, "Houſes "of Induſtry appear, from the review

"which

" which has been had of the general
" theory reſpecting them, and alſo from
" the inſpection of ſuch as are ſituated
" within that county which firſt made
" the experiment, to lead to every good
" end: they, by the means of ſound
" morality, religious duties, good order,
" economy and ſobriety, make the reve-
" nue ariſing from the induſtry of the
" Poor more productive, and expend leſs
" in their maintenance; at the ſame time
" that maintenance is the reſult of an
" union of cleanlineſs, decency, and
" wholeſome plenty; the reverſe of what
" we ſee in the cottage; the reverſe of
" what we ſee in the pariſh workhouſe."

It has not eſcaped Mr. Ruggles, (who is an acute obſerver of all that relates to the Poor) that the parochial clergy ſeem peculiarly well calculated for acting in the ſervice of the Poor, within their reſpective pariſhes. Mr. Ruggles ſays, " Such authority, in all inſtances of pa-
" riſh relief, and in many other points,
" where authority confers conſequence,

" would enable the clergyman of the pa-
" riſh, to perſuade, by ſtrong arguments,
" the Poor to attend ſome place of worſhip
" conſtantly, either the church, or the
" meeting-houſe of ſome ſect, diſſentient
" from the church, if ſuch ſhould be in the
" pariſh, and ſuch ſhould be their religious
" tendency; and by inducements of in-
" tereſt, they would be able alſo to regulate
" their moral conduct, and allure them
" to an induſtrious life: the conſequence
" would be, better morals and more in-
" duſtry, which would meliorate the
" condition of the Poor, and diminiſh
" the expence of their maintenance;
" while the clergy of the eſtabliſhed
" church might, by theſe means, honour-
" ably to themſelves, in the line of their
" clerical function, and beneficially to
" the preſent and future life of their pa-
" riſhioners, aſſiſt to reduce thoſe bur-
" thenſome expences, which now lie ſo
" heavy on the ſhoulders of the laity
" principally. This being the fact, and
" ſuch their duty, if the legiſlature ſhould
" think proper to connect authority with

" that

" that duty, would not the nation have " a juſt right to expect a beneficial con- " ſequence."

It appears that Mr. Ruggles was conſulted by Mr. Pitt on the ſubject of his intended bill, and we have a copy of two memoirs delivered to Mr. Roſe, containing ſome uſeful arrangements, but leaving the power of Overſeers nearly untouched; and they of courſe would have remained independent of every controul, as having the purſe of the pariſh in their hands. This fact cannot, in my opinion, be too often adverted to, it is a leading feature in my plan, and the detaching the duty of Collector or rather Treaſurer, from that of Overſeer, would alone produce immediate and incalculable advantages in the management of the Poor. All wrangling about the office of Overſeer would immediately ceaſe. The union of intereſted individuals would be completely diſſolved, and an end put to parochial jobs, &c.

In taking a general review of the ſentiments of different authors on the condition of the Poor; and their plans for bettering the ſtate of the really indigent, in directing the right application of the immenſe ſums granted for their relief; we have to conſider a bill brought into Parliament in the end of the year 1796, by Mr. Pitt, which ſhows how ſtrongly and juſtly he was impreſſed with the neceſsity of producing habits of induſtry as an indiſpenſable prelude to comfort and independence.

This bill propoſes the erection of Schools of Induſtry in pariſhes united, and to compel ſingle pariſhes to do the ſame, when they do not unite with others for that purpoſe. I am convinced that Schools of Induſtry will be the moſt powerful inſtruments that can be placed in the hands of thoſe who manage the concerns of the Poor, in order to reform the habits of the lower claſs of people, and to give a proper turn to the diſpoſitions

and

and manners of the riſing generation. I do not give this as merely a theoretical opinion. Our School of Induſtry at Lewiſham was inſtituted before Mr. Pitt's bill was brought into Parliament, and the advantage which the pariſh has derived from it, is allowed, by all deſcriptions of people; and the ſaving to the Poors rates, by providing early for the pariſh youth, has been demonſtrated in my account of our Poor. It does not appear to me, however, that Mr. Pitt's bill ſeparates the leſs worthy part of the Poor, from the deſerving objects and children, which I think highly neceſſary, and eaſy to be accompliſhed.

One article in Mr. Pitt's bill glances at the neceſsity of attending (in voting at veſtries) to the amount of the rates of a majority, as well as to their number. I do not recollect the ſame idea having occurred to others, but I believe attempts are frequently made to out-vote the firſt renters, and moſt reſpectable landholders in pariſhes, by bringing together thoſe

who pay but a very few ſhillings to the rates, ſo that I have long wiſhed to ſee this idea extended further. It would be eaſy in moſt pariſhes to bring together twenty perſons and upwards at a veſtry, whoſe collected rates would not amount to the one half of what is paid by an individual renter. Is this a true repreſentation of property? Or is it fair to ſay that a veſtry ſo compoſed has a right to diſpoſe of the Poors rates by a majority in numbers? In many incorporated bodies, the privilege of voting is increaſed to two or more votes according to the intereſt of the individual in the concern, and where it is below a certain ſum, the right of voting is denied. Might not the right of voting at veſtries be regulated in the ſame manner?

Mr. Pitt's humanity has led him to propoſe penſioning the parents of more than two children, &c. which has excited much general alarm, and would certainly, in the unqualified manner it is brought forward, have opened a door to great im-

poſition, and heavy calls on the Poors rates, without, in many inſtances, affording the relief intended by it. This laſt circumſtance will be beſt underſtood by thoſe who have a practical knowledge of the habits and manners of the lower claſs of people. I like the principle; but all who have attended to the detail of applications from the Poor, muſt be convinced that, in ſupplying their wants, it will be highly neceſſary to be guided, as much as poſsible, by that mode which is leaſt liable to abuſe. Pecuniary aid is, I believe, the moſt liable to abuſe of any, and a weekly allowance to the parents of children, would very frequently encourage idleneſs and drunkenneſs, and be but ſeldom applied to the comforts of thoſe it is intended for. The great queſtion therefore is, what ſort of relief is likely to find its way to the large family of a labourer, without a riſque of the parents leaning improperly on it. I am convinced there is no manner of contributing to the comfort of the Poor in this country, ſo ſafely and well, as by a ſupply of blankets,

the property of the pariſh, lent out for the winter months, and marked ſo as to prevent their being converted into money. Thoſe who have been in the habit of viſiting the cottager and his family at that ſeaſon, ſhivering and cold even when covered with all the clothes in the houſe, what muſt they feel for the poor infants, who are probably ſtripped of their covering, to clothe their father and mother, when they go out in the morning to work.

Medical aſsiſtance is another mode of relief, not liable to abuſe, and if more is proper for the regular relief of a large family, it ſhould be done by allowing them a cottage rent free, which would ſecure comfort under many other miſfortunes.

In affording relief to the lower orders, I am convinced that we ought to be regulated by a ſcale ſimilar to what I have now recommended. I have obſerved, with regret, that it has been propoſed to penſion the parent as his right, and not to

give

give it as a reward. One of the great cauſes of the preſent depravity and wretchedneſs of many in the lower orders of ſociety, has ariſen from their undervaluing the good opinion of their neighbours, and looking to their claims on the Poors rates more as a right, than a reward for unſucceſsful induſtry, or honeſty of character. All other ranks in ſociety feel the advantage of character, and generally value it, the lower ranks do not lean that way at all, and from the cauſe I mention. We cannot, for their own ſakes, bring them too ſoon back to it.

Mr. Pitt has propoſed even the allowance of a cow to cottagers under certain circumſtances, and I confeſs that the gift may be ſometimes made as a matter of policy and humanity, but it muſt be very guardedly allowed. The cottager's character ought to be well eſtabliſhed by his reſpectable neighbours; his means of maintaining a cow ſhould be well aſcertained through the ſame channel, and the probability of its being highly uſeful,

from

from his character, the ſtate of his family, &c. ſhould be likewiſe rendered evident. The neceſsity of all theſe precautions can only occur to thoſe who have ſome practical knowledge of the ſtate of the Poor. It cannot be expected, that even the abilities of the CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER can graſp the detail of all this. This bill propoſes caſual relief, before the object is reduced to the laſt extremity of diſtreſs, which is certainly humane, politic, and proper.

The plan of making up full wages to thoſe who do not earn them, would certainly open a door to great impoſition and abuſe.

In the ſeventy-ſixth clauſe of the heads of this bill, as firſt publiſhed, it was enacted, that a treaſurer ſhould be appointed, by the perſons employed in the management of the Poor, " to be treaſurer " of the funds for the ſupport of the " School or Schools of Induſtry, and for " the employment of the Poor, under the " authority

" authority of the act, &c." This one clauſe would, in my opinion, render more eſſential ſervice to the cauſe of the Poor and the rates, than all the acts of parliament that have been paſſed ſince the forty-third of Elizabeth. I do not, however, ſee why the appointment of treaſurer ſhould be with thoſe who are in office, and not with the pariſh at large; I mean the pariſh in value as well as number; nor do I think it ſhould be an annual appointment, where ſecurity is once granted, and the buſineſs conducted to the ſatisfaction of the pariſh; the nomination ſhould not be diſturbed by any parochial intrigue. I am, indeed, ſo much inclined to have the treaſurer independent of the people in office, if not of the pariſh at large, that I have ſometimes thought it would be better to have a treaſurer for the diviſion, hundred, or diſtrict, appointed by the juſtices of the peace. I could have wiſhed to have ſeen this regulation more diſtinguiſhed than it is in Mr. Pitt's bill; in the firſt place, it appears only, that a " treaſurer *may* be elected for

" any

" any pariſh or united pariſhes," and in ſome of the preceding clauſes, the whole of this ſeems contradicted, and the power of receiving and expending money, left in the ſame hands as at preſent. In the fifty-ſeventh clauſe it is enacted, " That " it ſhall and may be lawful for any per- " ſon or perſons, willing to contribute " towards the building or purchaſing of " any houſe or houſes, for the purpoſe of " eſtabliſhing any School or Schools of In- " duſtry therein, or the purchaſing a ſuf- " ficient ſtock of materials and imple- " ments, to ſet the poor to work, to pay " *to the Overſeers of the Poor* of any pa- " riſh, any ſum or ſums of money, by " way of ſubſcription or benefaction for " that purpoſe. And all ſums of money, " ſo paid, ſhall be applied to the uſe for " which the ſame ſhall be ſubſcribed, and " the Overſeers receiving the ſame, ſhall " be accountable, *in like manner as they* " *are hereby, or otherwiſe by law, made ac-* " *countable for the rates raiſed for the relief* " *of the Poor*, and ſhall keep their ac- " counts of the ſame in like manner."

This

This clauſe cannot, in my opinion, be reconciled with the ſeventy-ſixth, and it fixes, at any rate, on a very unfortunate deſcription of people (for the encouragement of ſubſcription or beneſaction) to receive and expend the money, according to the general opinion of the conduct of *Overſeers*.

Some parts of Mr. Pitt's bill have excited much alarm in the minds of thoſe who have taken a lead in directing pariſhes, and Houſes of Induſtry, managed by ſpecial Acts of Parliament, though I rather hope and think that this bill was not meant to diſturb inſtitutions evidently conducted with great propriety and advantage, and to the ſatisfaction of the reſpectable and well informed part of the ſociety. I have now before me a publication on this ſubject, " of the Joint Veſtry of the " United Pariſhes of St. Giles's in the " Fields, and St. George, Bloomſbury, " printed by order of the ſaid Veſtry." We have only to look at the liſt of the members of this joint Veſtry, to be convinced that the affairs of theſe two pa-

riſhes

riſhes are in the beſt of hands. The following remark is made in the introduction to this pamphlet. "This one pariſh is "taken as an example, becauſe the ten "thouſand pariſhes in England form a "ſubject of inquiry ſo extenſive, as to "tend rather to confound than to inform "the judgment, and to lead it aſtray, "from the ſafe paths of experience, into "the untried and probably dangerous re-"gions of mere ſpeculation." It muſt be allowed, however, that a ſolitary inſtance, which includes *St. Giles's and its purlieus*, may not apply very generally. The management of the Poor of that pariſh ought to be different, perhaps, from that of any other pariſh in the kingdom. This joint veſtry obſerves, very juſtly, the great hazard we run in being compelled to grant allowances, not leſs than a ſpecific ſum, to parents of children, as, by this means, all differences in ability of the parents are levelled, and no diſcretion left as to the minimum of aſſiſtance to be given. The increaſe to the rate, in St. Giles's pariſh, from this regulation, would certainly

certainly be very great, and has given them juſt cauſe of alarm. The clauſe which obliges the Officers to make up deficiency of wages has, likewiſe, attracted their notice. There are other objections, of ſome weight, made to the bill introduced by Mr. Pitt; but at the ſame time, the extravagant inſtance of a pariſh, differing perhaps from every other in the kingdom, in the degree of poverty, wretchedneſs, and vice, to be found among its inhabitants, ſhould not be conſidered as a right criterion in judging of all the clauſes in Mr. Pitt's bill, which is, in ſome inſtances, contraſted with practices that muſt be peculiar to a pariſh full of Paupers*.

Mr. Wood, one of the directors of the Houſe of Induſtry, at Shrewſbury, of whom I have had before occaſion to make

* The pariſhes of St. Giles and St. George, Bloomſbury, ſeem peculiarly well calculated to derive great advantage from one or more parochial ſoup ſhops, where tickets for ſoup might be iſſued at half price, or gratis, according to the ſtate of the families applying, and in lieu of money given on a very heavy caſualty liſt.

reſpect-

reſpectable mention, has addreſſed a letter to Sir William Pulteney, Bart. on the ſubject of Mr. Pitt's bill, occaſioned, in ſome degree, by the apprehenſion of the bill in queſtion being an encroachment on the rights and privileges of Houſes of Induſtry, conducted under ſpecial Acts of Parliament. Mr. Wood, however, does not confine his remarks to this clauſe. He admits, " that the remedy muſt con-
" ſiſt in the adoption of ſome plan for in-
" troducing *induſtry* among the Poor, and
" compelling all that are able, to earn
" their own ſupport;" and adds, " But
" it is as true, that ſo long as the ma-
" nagement of the Poor is veſted in *an-*
" *nual* Officers, whether they be deno-
" minated *Overſeers*, Managers, or Wardens
" of the Poor, every attempt to effect
" this important reform, muſt inevitably
" fail of ſucceſs." Mr. Wood does not expect more eſſential ſervices from the *members of parliament, privy counſellors, commiſsioners of the land tax, &c. &c.* as viſitors of the Poor. Mr. Wood's great experience authoriſes his ſaying, that a

few

few zealous individuals may be found to act in this capacity, at the outſet, but they will ſoon be diſguſted with the rubs and obſtacles that muſt perpetually occur, and the duty will then revert to the Overſeer, and render "*confuſion worſe con-*" *founded.*"

Mr. Wood does not allow that manufactures committed to the management of a ſucceſsion of men ſo circumſtanced can ever ſucceed; and ſurely if the buſineſs falls into the hands of Wardens or annual Overſeers, the plan muſt fall to the ground, after entailing a very heavy expence on the public. The right given by Mr. Pitt's bill to parents claiming weekly allowances, has not eſcaped Mr. Wood's notice, and he has pointed out in ſtrong colours the probable miſchiefs that might be done by it. Mr. Wood obſerves, that the bill does not provide for the reception of the aged, the infirm, or children that are thrown on the pariſh from their birth.

I am happy to find by Mr. Wood's letter that the Directors of their Houſe of Induſtry do now furniſh liberal relief to the poor in their own dwellings. I have been always aware of the neceſsity of guarding againſt frauds and impoſitions in affording this ſort of relief; but I am convinced that both humanity and policy dictate the propriety of giving it, and that checks may be invented to prevent any abuſe from this indulgence.

Mr. Belſham has publiſhed ſome remarks on the bill now under conſideration, and his obſervations go nearly to the ſame points of objection with the authors I have already mentioned. He likewiſe obſerves, that " The firſt and moſt ſtrik-
" ing objection to Mr. Pitt's plan is,
" that, inſtead of ſimplifying a ſyſtem al-
" ready too *complex*, it makes, by engraft-
" ing a heap of new upon the *exiſting ſtock*
" *of old proviſions*, the entire aggregate or
" code of Poor laws infinitely more operoſe,
" confuſed, and intricate than before."

Mr. Belſham ſhows great practical knowledge of the ſtate of the Poor laws, and the preſent wretched ſyſtem of managing thoſe pariſhes not regulated by ſpecial acts of Parliament. I am happy in being able to quote ſo good an authority on the eligibility and advantage of a parochial fund as ſuggeſted by Mr. Pitt. He ſays, "This "fund under proper limitations and with "the modifications, would unqueſtionably "be a moſt excellent and beneficial inſti- "tution: and the ſuggeſtion of ſuch an "eſtabliſhment, as well as many other "clauſes and proviſions of this bill, diſ- "cover a real and earneſt deſire to reform "and improve the ſtate of the Poor, "though blended with principles eſſen- "tially and radically erroneous." Mr. Belſham proceeds to ſuggeſt means of relieving poverty, and rendering the poor leſs liable to vexatious removals, &c. His experience and great humanity have dictated the propriety of exempting the labouring Poor from the burden of the Poors tax. He propoſes, that the magiſtrates

ſhould be inveſted with the power, under certain limitations, of fixing the minimum of rate to be paid. In addition to the argument for this being done on the ſcore of humanity, which is ſelf evident, I have to add that I believe the policy of the meaſure is with us, for I could prove that the expence of collecting ſuch rates by ſummonſes, &c. exceeds the amount of thoſe actually collected from the labouring Poor, ſo that the pariſh loſes every way by rating that deſcription of people.

Mr. Voght has given an excellent account of the management of the Poor in Hamburgh ſince 1788, and much of what has been done there might be wiſely adopted in this country. I wiſh we could imitate their example in the following reſpects, where it applies. He ſays, "The "treaſurer makes his balance every week, "and preſents it every month to the "committee"——Our books are cloſed "every Saturday; and out of the very "numerous payments made by the

" treaſurer in a year, the ſmalleſt would " be found out in a quarter of an " hour."

The above remark applies to an expenditure of upwards of Fourteen Thouſand Pounds a year. Mr. Voght obſerves, in another place, that the publicity of the accounts is one cauſe of their ſucceſs, and adds, " It is this only that prevents " all inſtitutions of this kind from be- " coming *a job*, the Directors from being " careleſs of the public approbation or " cenſure, and the whole adminiſtration " from falling into the hands of under " officers, who afterwards know ſo well " *to embroil the buſineſs*, that no ſubſe- " quent Directors were able to *unravel the* " *clue*." Thus we find the ſame cauſe producing the ſame effect on the Continent as here; but have our plans and acts of Parliament remedied this evil?

I cannot leave this part of my ſubject without taking ſome notice of the attempts

that have been made to promote Friendly Societies, for I conſider every improvement in them as leading to the moſt deſirable and enviable manner of giving comfort to the labourer, and of inſtilling into his mind a love of his country and its conſtitution.

The rules and regulations of the Caſtle Eden Friendly Society, contain much uſeful information on this ſubject, and ſhew what good may be done by ſuch means. The progreſs of this Society ſeems to have been carefully watched, and improvements introduced as they were found from experience to be neceſſary. I cannot ſee any objection to the inveſtment of the capitals of theſe Societies in the public funds, and by that means to create a new intereſt in the members to the welfare of the country and its conſtitution. At any rate, if a parochial fund is ever formed as a foundation or capital to tempt ſubſcribers to become members of Friendly Societies, the money ſhould be inveſted in

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the public funds; and this ſort of inveſtment might perhaps be facilitated by the Commiſsioners appointed by Act of Parliament to redeem the national debt.

The Rev. Mr. Cowe, Vicar of Sunbury, Middleſex, has publiſhed Philanthropic Tracts, including an Eſſay on the State of the Poor, and the means of improving it by Friendly Societies. It appears that there are two Societies of this ſort at Sunbury, conſiſting of about one hundred and twenty members, and both in a flouriſhing condition, having property in the funds. The regulations of theſe Societies ſeem good, and I was glad to find in the abſtract of the ſubſcriptions, a column for honorary members and legacies, all which would prove very productive ſources of accumulation to ſuch funds when well underſtood. Before theſe Societies were formed, the Poors-rates at Sunbury had reached to three ſhillings and ſixpence in the pound; they have been

ſince this eſtabliſhment as low as one ſhilling and ſixpence, and never higher than one ſhilling and ninepence.

Having now given ſome general account of the ſentiments and plans of many gentlemen who have been ardently and zealouſly engaged in the cauſe of the Poor, I have endeavoured to confine my remarks as much as poſsible to thoſe points, which apply more particularly to the plan I mean to recommend, as ariſing out of the practice I have had in managing the concerns of the Poor in an extenſive pariſh for two years, joined to the knowledge and information I have acquired by the peruſal of moſt publications on the ſubject.

My great attack is on the office of Overſeer, conſtituted as at preſent, and I conceive the failure of all bills and plans hitherto propoſed or adopted, has ariſen from our not viewing this appointment as the

the great obſtacle to all our wiſhes on the ſubject.

If I have formed a juſt and unbiaſſed opinion reſpecting the great cauſe of our failure, the office of Overſeer muſt be very differently conducted from what it has been, and I view this as ſo eſſentially neceſſary to the well being of the Poor and right application of the fund for their relief, as to conſider every thing elſe which I have to recommend as ſubordinate to this great object, and not likely to produce any good effect, unleſs we proceed immediately to the root of all the evil and miſchief.

I am warranted in this aſſertion by all that has been written on the ſubject of the Poor, though, wonderful to tell, every bill that has been formed for their relief (which I have met with) has been ſo tender of this office, and touched ſo lightly on its duties, as to leave

leave the appointment nearly as before; frequently, indeed, confirming former Acts of Parliament on the duties and offices of *Overseers*.

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FOR THE

FUTURE GOVERNMENT AND CONTROL

OF ALL THAT CONCERNS

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE POOR.

AFTER what has been ſaid on the practice of this individual pariſh, and the opinions of others on the ſubject of managing the concerns of the Poor, I wiſh to draw the attention of my reader to the application of my experience with reſpect to the general method of treating them; pointing out where the Poor laws, in my opinion, are deficient, and ſuggeſting a plan for removing theſe difficulties at as little hazard as poſsible from its novelty. The whole buſineſs of the Poor hinges on the duties of the Overſeers, and the manner in which they are executed, for (except the right of an appeal on the part

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of the Pauper to the Bench) there is hardly any check on their conduct; and the powers with which they are inveſted are immenſe, which I really conſider as the foundation of all the evils that attend the ſyſtem.

I ſhall ſtate, under a few particulars, what I conceive to be that medley of confidence and menial duty which has done all the miſchief. The Overſeers, in the firſt place, have the purſe of the pariſh ſo completely put into their hands, that the Act of Parliment authorizes their calling weekly, if they ſee proper, for a rate, and without the leaſt limitation with reſpect to its quantum; and in this "the concurrence of the inhabitants in "making a rate is not at all neceſſary. *" Two of his Majeſty's Juſtices of the Peace *muſt* confirm the rate by ſigning the ſame; I ſay muſt, for this is ſo perfectly a miniſterial duty on their part, that if they refuſe, the Court of King's Bench would

* See Burn, 18th Edition, 3d Vol. p. 749.

grant

grant a mandamus to compel them *. Here is a proof of unbounded confidence on the part of the Legiſlature; nor is this all, for the Overſeers are not obliged to give any account of their receipts or expenditure till a fortnight after Eaſter; ſo that if an Overſeer becomes a bankrupt when in office, the pariſh, according to a deciſion of Lord Mansfield, cannot ſue for the debt till that period arrives. How much muſt we admire the humanity, liberality, and generoſity of our anceſtors, who had thus declared that the Poor ſhould be taken care of and maintained by a rate or payment on all the property of the pariſh to any extent, if neceſſary. It is impoſsible to think too highly of this part of the Act of Parliament, which voluntarily provides ſo amply for the indigent; but ſhould we not be extremely careful that ſo extenſive a power ſhould not be liable to abuſe, and eſpecially that ſort of abuſe which encourages idleneſs and profligacy, and occaſions in the end

* Burn, 18th Edit. 3d Vol. p. 746.

poverty

poverty and miſery. We might reaſonably expect, that when the Legiſlature placed ſuch powers in the hands of individuals, they would, at the ſame time, have taken care that the individuals were, from ſituation and reſpectability, above the temptation of miſ-applying them, to promote their own private views and intereſts; but let us now ſee what other duties are impoſed on Overſeers, and we ſhall ſoon diſcover that they, in a manner, exclude every perſon of reſpectability and independence from accepting the office. The Overſeer, in the firſt place, is to be his own tax-gatherer, or collector; he is the perſon who muſt ſummons defaulters, and he muſt in perſon ſue for a warrant, and act the part of a Sheriff's Officer, by giving his perſonal attendance in levying by diſtreſs, &c. The buſineſs of collecting has been aſsigned by the Overſeers with conſent of veſtry (as in my own caſe) to another, but the veſtry could not exonerate the Overſeer from the riſk and reſponſibility of appointing another to collect, and when a ſummons

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or warrant was to be executed, none but the Overſeer could do it. If a Pauper is to be removed to a diſtant part of the kingdom, he muſt be conveyed by an Overſeer, and without actual delivery, by his own hands, there is no obligation on the part of the pariſh to which he is removed to receive him. In ſhort, as the law now ſtands, there is not a duty, be it ever ſo menial and degrading, which relates to the Poor, that is not to be performed perſonally by the Overſeer. I have therefore no heſitation in ſaying, that the office of Overſeer is ſo conſtituted, that no perſon of reſpectability and independence can accept it, to execute literally all the law directs him to do; and that it is on the other hand ſo conſtituted as to make it highly hazardous both for the good of ſociety, and the moral habits of individuals, to place ſo much confidence and property (without any control, but of the moſt nugatory ſort) in the hands of people whoſe occupation or connection expoſe them to the temptation of abuſing a fund appointed

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for the relief of the indigent; the proper and honourable management of which is ſo peculiarly a ſacred duty, and on which the general habits and diſpoſitions of the lower claſs of people in this country ſo entirely depend. The adminiſtration of relief to the Poor, involves more good or harm in it than one may at firſt imagine. I firmly believe, that greater injury has been done to the comfort and happineſs of the Poor by the mal-adminiſtration of the Poors rates, than good by the proper application of them. Idleneſs and profligacy have been more frequently encouraged, than effectual aid granted to indigence. Mr. Wood, in his valuable account of the Shrewſbury Houſe of Induſtry, ſays, " It may appear a *bold*, but " perhaps will not be found a *groundleſs* " aſſertion, that nearly one half of the " money expended on the parochial Poor, " is miſapplied in conſequence of the " want of an acquaintance with them, " and experience of the artful ſtratagems " they have recourſe to in order to ex- " tort undeſerved relief. Whilſt they

" can

" can have their wants ſupplied, without
" labour, they will moſt certainly remain
" idle; and to obtain this ſupply, they
" are naturally tempted to fabricate falſ-
" hoods, and impoſe themſelves, as ob-
" jects of charity, upon the Officer or the
" Magiſtrate."

We have next to conſider what checks the Legiſlature has invented, for ſecuring the right application of the money received by the Overſeers, and the accounting in a clear and diſtinct manner, to the public, for their intromiſsions, &c. I am convinced, from experience, that every plan hitherto adopted, by the Legiſlature, has proved completely nugatory in theſe reſpects, and for reaſons that I ſhall mention hereafter. It is very true, that the Overſeers are obliged, by the Act of William and Mary, " to keep a book or
" books, wherein the names of perſons
" who receive collection, pay, or relief,
" ſhall be regiſtered, with the day and
" year when they were admitted, and the
" occaſion which brought them under

" that neceſsity; and yearly, in Eaſter
" week (or as often as ſhall be thought
" convenient), the pariſhioners ſhall meet
" in veſtry, before whom the books ſhall
" be produced, and all perſons receiving
" collection or relief ſhall be called over,
" and the reaſon of their taking relief ex-
" amined, and a new liſt made of ſuch as
" ſhall think fit to receive collection or
" relief; no other perſon is to be allowed
" collection, at the charge of the pariſh,
" but by order under the hand of ſome
" juſtice of the peace, &c. &c."

A ſtrict adherence to this part of the Overſeers duty, ſo clearly laid down, would ſimplify this item of expence, and render its examination, before the juſtices at the Bench, eaſy and pleaſant, ſerving as a check on the Overſeers diſburſements, under that one head; but as far as my information goes, even this defined line of duty is never executed as the Act directs. It is alſo true, that Overſeers accounts are liable to an examination, " yearly, ſoon " after Eaſter;" firſt by a veſtry, and af-

terwards at the Bench of juſtices; but has ſuch an examination ever thrown any light on the ſubject? has it ever produced the rejection of charges that were wantonly or unfairly incurred, or ever pointed out extravagance, in any particular article of expenditure, which has led to future economy in management? I believe ſeldom, if ever; but are we to conclude from thence, that there is not any abuſe? The Overſeer having, in fact, received the money, in the firſt inſtance, his voucher, in the form of a bill, caſual expence, or otherwiſe, is all that the pariſh has for it, unleſs an appeal is entered againſt the account, in which caſe it will be found, that the Overſeer having already paid himſelf, the whole *onus probandi* will fall on the appealing member of the pariſh, and the Overſeer being the defendant, cannot have much to fear from the inveſtigation of accompts only known to himſelf, eſpecially if all the vouchers remain in his own hands, after going out of office. In ſhort, this Quixotical mode of appealing to the accompts of Over-

ſeers, is too abſurd to have been often practiſed. Accompts that muſt paſs, as a matter of courſe, before a veſtry, are not likely to be better underſtood by the gentlemen of the Bench, or liable to objections there, after having been allowed by the pariſh. The ſpirit and independence of gentlemen on the Bench has, however, now and then, led them to object to Overſeers accounts, after having been brought before them; but, unhappily for the public, it has been decided, that the juſtices had no right to interrogate the Overſeers on the particulars of their accounts, and a mandamus* has been granted to compel them to receive the oath, and ſign them. Thus has the door been completely ſhut againſt all inveſtigation.

It muſt appear evident, that Overſeers accompts, at the end of the year, cannot, under the moſt favourable circumſtances, be a ſubject of critical examination, un-

* See Burn, 3d Vol. Page 835.

leſs they are kept in a ſyſtematical regular way, pointing out every item of expence, under a diſtinct head, and in ſuch a manner as to ſhew, at one view, if the ſervice performed bears any proportion to the expence incurred. Thus, for inſtance, the charge of maintaining the Paupers in the houſe, ſhould be one head of expence, with an exact ſtatement of the average number of Poor fed by the week, month, or year. The ſame might be done with the expence of clothing, the caſualty liſt, expence of removals, law charges, &c.

All accompts of the ſort, that I have ever ſeen, departed ſo completely from this principle, as to be ſtudiouſly involved in obſcurity, that rendered them perfectly unintelligible to the beſt informed, and without conveying any one idea on the mode of ſupplying articles, or the average expence of maintaining the Paupers in a Workhouſe; indeed, the looking at the ſum total, furniſhes the gentlemen at the veſtry or Bench, with all the information

they can acquire by a ſtrict examination. Mr. Ruggles ſays, "We ſuffer an immenſe "revenue to be raiſed on us, for two good "purpoſes, for Induſtry and Charity, and "permit the perverſion of one half of it; "for was one half of the revenue honeſtly "and fairly applied to the purpoſes of "the Act, the Poor would be more cre-"ditably and comfortably maintained, "and the other half might remain in the "pockets of that claſs of the community, "from whom the whole is with ſuch "ſtrictneſs exacted*." Of the truth of the above obſervation, there does not remain the ſmalleſt doubt in my mind. Mr. Gilbert, and I believe every author on the ſubject ſince his publications, have recommended and pointed out the neceſsity of accurate and clear ſtatements of the Overſeers expences, under diſtinct heads; and Mr. Ruggles has given us a form for this purpoſe, which would anſwer, in my opinion, extremely well;

* Vid. Page 58, 4to Edition.

but

but theſe gentlemen ſhould have recollected, that the Act of Parliament *obliges* Overſeers to give in their account of reliefs in a very correct and exact manner, though the leaſt attention is not, in general, paid by them in doing it. Let us not, therefore, ſatisfy ourſelves with the idea of the buſineſs being better executed, in conſequence of any new Act of Parliament to enforce regulations totally overlooked in the face of an exiſting law, but rather let us conſider of ſome other means of preventing an evil which continues, in ſpite of all the ſolemnity of law. I believe, firmly, that while we ſet out with putting the money into the hands of the Overſeer, we ſhall never be able to remedy the evil ſo much complained of. The difference is very great, between advancing money to an agent, and then receiving from him vouchers as an acquittal of the debt; and the obliging that agent to produce vouchers, made out, in exact conformity with certain and ſpecified regulations, before the money is paid. There is a vulgar adage, very much

in point, which ſays, " Poſſeſsion is equal " to nine points of the law;" it may therefore be depended on, as a fact, that while the pariſh Officer continues his own pay-maſter, all laws and regulations, which bind him to a certain form and mode of keeping accompts, will not be of any avail; but the moment after the regulation obliges the form, whatever it is, to precede the payment, as a *ſine qua non*, it will be moſt punctually attended to.

In the early ſtages of the Poor-laws, it ſeems to have been the wiſh of the Legiſlature to prevent every poſsible expence in the collection or expenditure of the Poors-rates, and a compulſory duty was therefore laid on the pariſhioners, which would have been long ſince very grievouſly complained of, if the ſweets of office had not been ſometimes taſted by them. In thoſe days the amount of the rates was trifling, and time had not taught individuals the various means of improving their ſituation. The caſe is now very different. The rates are an object of great conſequence, either as they reſpect the individuals

individuals who pay them, the perſons to be relieved by them, or the public at large; and every year adds ſome uſeful hint to the perſon who manages them gratuitouſly, which reconciles him to a duty extremely arduous and burthenſome, too much for him who has any thing elſe to attend to, and quite enough to give full employment to any one. I think it will be univerſally allowed, that the duty of an Overſeer, if executed honourably and ſacredly, without a view to fee or reward, is more troubleſome than it ought to be, and loads the individual (very unneceſſarily) with points of duty, which could be much better performed by others, and more to the advantage of the pariſh. If the duty falls into the hands of a perſon who means to make a job of it, he may not complain of the trouble of collecting the money, but I am ſure the pariſh will have great reaſon to regret the fund being placed in ſuch hands in ſo unqualified a manner. I really wiſh it to be underſtood that I am much more at variance with the ſyſtem, than the Overſeer,

ſeer, for I cannot ſee on what fair ground a pariſh has a right to claim ſuch ſervices, from individuals, whoſe conſtant attendance is moſtly required in their own occupations, while others, who have a greater intereſt in the welfare of all that relates to the pariſh, ſhrink from the duty. If tradeſmen are to be the Overſeers, I ſhould only wiſh them to declare, candidly, that ſuch a ſacrifice of time, and perſonal attention, cannot be given by them, without ſome remuneration, and if it is not in the form of a ſalary, it muſt be made up in ſome other way. This would be a fair argument, and its force muſt be admitted by all.

The money concerns of the Poor are, in my opinion, the moſt irkſome and diſagreeable part of the duty of an Overſeer; and, I believe, this will be found to be the opinion of all who do not derive an advantage from the management of that purſe. I am convinced, that half the evil which ariſes from the mal-adminiſtration of the Poors-rates, would be removed by ſeparating the duties of Overſeer and Collector; and placing the

the fund in the hands of a treaſurer, from whence it ſhould not be drawn, but under ſuch ſpecific forms and regulations as would ſecure its right application. I am likewiſe certain, that by ſuch a regulation, one of the great objections to the acceptance of the office, by perſons of character and reputation, would be removed, and that one great temptation to obtain the ſituation for nefarious purpoſes, would be completely at an end. The expence of paying a collector, is more than amply made up to the pariſh, by the cloſeneſs with which the money would be collected, as has been fully proved by the practice of this pariſh for the laſt two years. The fluctuating ſituation of Overſeer, gives defaulters to the rates a chance of eſcaping from paying on a change taking place, being often under proſecution at the moment the Overſeer goes out of office. This plan, which would ſo effectually relieve the officer whoſe intentions are fair and honourable, ſhould be adopted in the fulleſt extent, by not ſuffering one farthing of the rates to be paid, but

through

through the channel of the Treaſurer. I would not even allow the ſmall ſum that might ſometimes be required by the Overſeer, for advances, to be paid him in any other way than as a loan, or impreſt in his individual capacity, with ſuch a note or bill as might be acted on, without the ſmalleſt plea, on his part, for a ſet off againſt pariſh claims; otherwiſe, on his going out of office, this money might be ſwallowed up in doubtful claims, and the old game played ſucceſsfully, againſt both the veſtry and Bench, on the ſtrength of the means of paying himſelf being in his own hands. There is another argument in favour of this plan, which, though of leſs moment, is deſerving of attention; I mean the having, by this means, ſecurity, both from the Collector and Treaſurer, which cannot be required from the Overſeer, in the exerciſe of a compulſory duty. A late circumſtance in this pariſh, narrated elſewhere, points out the neceſsity of ſecurity being given for pariſh money in the hands of an individual. The perſons moſt proper to collect Poors-

rates,

rates, would certainly be thoſe who collect government taxes, and from whom ſecurity could be eaſily obtained. The Treaſurer ſhould be a perſon of known property, and likewiſe obliged to find ſecurity, and by making it an appointment for the diviſion or hundred, it would become an object to bankers or others to open accounts with each pariſh, and do the duty without any gratuity or advantage beyond that of having balances in their hands.

After having given ſo decided an opinion on the propriety of ſeparating the office of Collector from that of Overſeer, both for the ſake of affording ſecurity to the pariſh, and ſaving trouble to the officer, it is ſcarcely neceſſary to obſerve, that the Collector of Poors-rates muſt have the ſame authority for ſummoning, levying by diſtreſs, &c. as the Overſeers now have.

It may be proper now to point out how the money is to be drawn out of the hands

of

of the treaſurer, and what ſhould be deemed an authority for him to pay it.—This brings me to another part of the plan which I conſider as eſſential to the welfare of the Poor, the public, and the fund, the intereſts of all which are ſo blended and connected that it is impoſsible to ſeparate them. When the real Poor are beſt taken care of, and the idle ſent to work, the greateſt juſtice is done to the public, and the fund is beſt managed. I have therefore to propoſe that there ſhould not be one farthing expended of the Poors-rates without a correſponding voucher, arranged in a regular and uniform manner, under the ſuperintendance of a perſon appointed for that purpoſe by his Majeſty's Juſtices of the Peace for all the pariſhes of their diviſion, or hundred; ſo that when theſe accompts are to be paſſed at the Bench, they ſhall all appear as kept by one perſon, and ſhew at one view the amount under each diſtinct head, and the ſervice done, by mentioning the numbers fed in the houſe, relieved as penſioners, as caſualties, &c. and in a column

column for remarks there ſhould always be notice taken of increaſe or decreaſe in expence againſt each item, ſo as to draw the attention of examiners to enquire, in the one caſe to guard againſt the increaſe of expence, and in the other to give the merit due for a decreaſe, for the encouragement of others, and to record the means that have reduced the expence: The perſon appointed ſhould be choſen by the gentlemen on the Bench, for the appointment is with a view to make tranſactions (generally ſtudiouſly obſcure) clear and diſtinct to thoſe who are finally to decide on them, and to bring the whole annually before the public in a conciſe form. This examiner or reporter of accompts ſhould be a good accomptant, and intelligent with reſpect to pariſh buſineſs. His duty ſhould be to furniſh each pariſh with a ſet of books for keeping and recording all diſburſements in the ſame ſtile. He ſhould have the right of inſpecting theſe books at all times, and of pointing out by a notice in writing, every deviation from the

the rule laid down. This ſhould only be done to the pariſh in the firſt inſtance, and not brought before the Bench if the error is immediately corrected. He ſhould certify monthly (or as often as may be required) that the accompts are right, and made out in compliance with the regulations, on which an order ſhould be granted on the Treaſurer for the amount of the diſburſements contained in them, and this order ſhould be ſigned by a certain number of pariſh officers, Church-wardens, or Overſeers, if there is not a ſpecial committee for auditing the accompts. The inſpector of accompts ſhould prepare annually a report to the Bench of the general management of the Poor in his diviſion as appearing on the face of the books, being always ready to ſtate any heavy increaſe or decreaſe of expence, with their cauſes. An abſtract made out in this manner ſhould, after being compared with the original pariſh accompts, be publiſhed in the provincial newſpapers annually, with the relative expence of the preceding year. Publicity and conciſeneſs are indiſ-

penſible

penſible requiſites in all parochial concerns.

This has been particularly recommended by the celebrated Dr. Franklin and others. The inſpector of accompts ſhould not in my opinion be authoriſed to controul the quantum of relief granted in any pariſh, but merely to keep the items of expence under certain defined heads, and to ſee that none are entered which have not a correſponding voucher, for I cannot admit, or ſee the neceſsity, of any charge being brought againſt the Poors-rates in a leſs qualified manner. By way of example I ſhall ſtate the expence incurred by caſual relief as the moſt difficult to keep within theſe bounds. I have mentioned before how ſucceſsfully I had confined this mode of relief to certain periods, which in number muſt be determined of courſe by the extent and population of a pariſh, but ſhould in all inſtances be fixed. I entered the name of each perſon applying for relief, ſo that the whole was done in a moment, unleſs

there was reaſon to doubt the fairneſs of the claim, but after a little knowledge of the characters who applied, this was a matter of eaſy deciſion. This book ought therefore to be conſidered as a voucher for allowing every article granted them in money or clothing, if it is always ſigned by the officer attending the examination, with the date, and may be transferred to the general monthly or annual account, as money or clothing granted on ſuch a day per caſualty book. In extenſive pariſhes it muſt now and then happen that an accident or misfortune brings an object unexpectedly for relief, and it ought to be granted. Such a power may be ſafely veſted in the Overſeer or Maſter of the Workhouſe, though not regularly ſitting in judgment on the claims of the Poor; but I would moſt certainly reject every ſuch application if not founded on the plea of urgency, and even then the name, &c. ſhould be taken down in form with the cauſe for ſuch extra relief, and it ſhould be inſerted in the firſt column of the caſualty liſt at the next meeting, ſo

as

as to bring all this expence under one head. The expence which I have mentioned as being eaſily brought under regulation, includes the bulk of what conſtitutes the ground of undefined claims againſt the pariſh, which give a ſanction to a thouſand charges, trifling when taken in the detail, but immenſe when conſidered in the groſs, either as articles of clothing, pecuniary aid, &c. and for which no voucher has been ever expected or thought neceſſary. This however is not the only advantage that will be derived from the ſolemnity of this examination of candidates for the benefit of Poors-rates. The real object will be relieved, not as at preſent with a ſhilling in common with the importunate vagrant, but the ſtate of his family, illneſs, or other circumſtances, will be deliberately conſidered, his reſpectable neighbour will be heard and attended to on the ſubject, and he will be encouraged to bring teſtimony of general good character and conduct, which would entitle him frequently to relief in a degree beyond what the Poor

have been accuſtomed to. I had invariably made it a rule to invite ſuch reſpectable applications in favour of poor people, and I have as frequently requeſted them to bring forward ſuch claims to pariſh relief. The fact is, that I wiſhed to remove as much as poſsible all dependence upon Poors-rates, but through the channel of ſuch recommendations, becauſe the lower claſs of people have ſuffered much in their habits and diſpoſitions by looking up to this fund as their right, and diſregarding every weight that character ought to give. I am therefore clearly of opinion that the examination of Paupers ſhould take place on certain days in open court, with full permiſsion for them to bring reſpectable teſtimony of their deſerts, and with a determination on the part of the Overſeers to give them all the advantage they are entitled to from ſuch report, reſerving however the right of finally deciding according to his own judgment. This plan muſt give a favourable turn at once to the views and habits of the Poor. When one perſon is amply

amply relieved in conſequence of having eſtabliſhed his claim to relief by reſpectable characters in his neighbourhood, and another is overlooked from the want of it, we ſhall ſoon find that the Poor will once more attempt to gain the good opinion of thoſe about them, as the beſt channel for ſecuring them aid in caſe of diſtreſs and misfortunes. It is very well known that at preſent the Poor (generally ſpeaking) come not to aſk, but demand relief as their right, and this is frequently done in terms very unbecoming and improper. God forbid that I ſhould impreſs the public with one unfavourable idea of that claſs of people who from age and other infirmities have a fair claim to parochial relief. My earneſt wiſh is, that they ſhould enjoy it much more than they do, and as they are in a great meaſure driven away from aſking for that ſort of aid, by the ſucceſsful importunity of the worthleſs, my great aim is to draw the line ſtrongly, and provide for the deſerving Poor, teaching them that in the lower as well as higher ranks of ſociety, it

will be well worth while to eſtabliſh a good character with thoſe who have opportunities of knowing them. As it is, the loweſt do not trouble themſelves about their conduct and behaviour to others, becauſe they do not find it of any uſe to them in their application for relief, be it ever ſo juſt or fair. I believe indeed that a Pauper would frequently be ſet aſide by the Overſeer, if it was known that he employed the interference of another to obtain him aſsiſtance.

It is perfectly unneceſſary for me to furniſh a form for keeping each item of expence under a clear and diſtinct head; nothing can be eaſier; the bills incurred in maintaining the Paupers in the houſe, including the wages of the maſter, coals, candles, &c. ſhould be given in monthly, or more frequently, and entered according to the form preſcribed; and when the amount is aſcertained, the average expence of feeding and clothing each Pauper ſhould be given. I have propoſed, that the appointment of Inſpector of accompts ſhould

be

be with the gentlemen of the Bench, becauſe they are to be ultimately paſſed there, and they ſhould certainly come before them in as intelligible a form as poſsible. The appointment being their nomination, any alteration in the plan propoſed by them will be ſooner carried into execution, and the Inſpector ſhould prepare a ſhort annual report on the whole, with permiſsion to point out where improvements have taken place, and to ſuggeſt others that may occur to himſelf. His ſalary might be paid from the county rate, or by individual pariſhes, proportioned to the labour done for them, to be ſettled by the Juſtices of the Peace of the Diviſion or Hundred; in either caſe, the amount would be paid from the Poors-rates. I do not know any Diviſion or Hundred that could require more than one Examiner. The uniformity of accompts would be greater if there were only one. The authority given to ſuch an office would be very limited, for it is only meant that the Inſpector ſhould check the charges againſt correſponding vouchers,

and even then without paſsing them finally, but to put them in a train for being eaſily comprehended by others who are to allow them.

Before I proceed to mention the other parts of a plan which are in my opinion ſubordinate to, and entirely dependent on, the full execution of what has been now propoſed, namely, ſeparating the money concerns from the duties of Overſeer, and compelling by that means the production of a regular voucher before payment, and introducing a conſiſtent ſpecific form of keeping all parochial charges, it may be proper for me to ſtate ſome of my reaſons for expecting ſuch important conſequences from a plan ſo ſimple and apparently unexceptionable. It is ſcarcely poſsible to deſcribe the averſion and diſguſt that generally prevails in the minds of many people to an interference with *Veſtries*, or the general concerns of the Poor; and this does not proceed from a want of ardour in the reſpectable part of the community to ſerve the Poor, or from a con-

a conſidence of the preſent ſyſtem being good, or executed with judgement and integrity in all inſtances. The fact is, that attempts of the ſort I mention have been generally defeated by the combination of intereſted people, who have multiplied all the difficulties that were to be encountered, and by a perſeverance, encouraged by ſelf-intereſt, have overcome by degrees the honourable efforts of thoſe who had not ſo ſtrong a point of union. This bond of union is at all times ſo extremely forcible with the deſcription of people I allude to, that I believe it is not uncommon to ſee the greateſt rivals and enemies united, at a veſtry, to vote away the Poors money in jobs. Let us therefore break down this combination, and we ſhall at once remove the great obſtacle to the interference of gentlemen in the concerns of the Poor; when we ſhall find that manly and diſintereſted ſpirit of independence called into action in the cauſe of diſtreſs and miſery; for the relief of which, the reſpectable part of the community have

have been ever ſo ready to ſignalize themſelves on all other occaſions. The deſcription of people on whom the management of the Poor has frequently fallen, are but little diſpoſed to ſacrifice their time and attention in pariſh ſquabbling, without an object; it is indeed ſo evidently againſt the intereſt of tradespeople to provoke ill-will on the part of their neighbours, that nothing but an intereſted object is likely to excite them to ſuch an oppoſition; and how muſt it be lamented, in every point of view, that this does ſometimes happen.

This regulation of ſeparating the purſe of the pariſh from the other duties of the Poor, would be a great relief to thoſe whoſe intentions are honourable, and would operate therefore as an additional inducement to ſuch, to give their beſt advice and aſſiſtance. If the mode of voting at veſtries were regulated by the value in rates, as well as numbers, as mentioned before, I am perſuaded that my plan would completely deſtroy all

oppoſition to the fair and honourable management of the Poors-rates, by putting it out of the power of intereſted people to make it that ſource of profit which many have hitherto done, and our veſtries would then be filled with perſons anxious to promote the welfare of the lower claſs, being aſſured that the harmony of theſe meetings was not likely to be diſturbed by ſelfiſh quarrels. My plan does not encroach on the power of calling for a rate, nor does it incur any expence except the trifling per centage to the Collector, as I take it for granted that Treaſurers for the Pariſh, or Diſtrict, will be found ready to open an account for the balances in their hands. Having aſſumed it as a fact, that this regulation will ſoon transfer the concerns of ~~the~~ Poor into the hands of more diſintereſted people than thoſe who are, generally ſpeaking, now in poſſeſſion of them, I ſhall point out a few of the advantages which I conceive the public are likely to derive immediately from the transfer. A diminution of the rates will inevitably take place, and if I may judge from

from my own experience, and that of others with whom I have communicated, the reduction may at leaſt amount to one third of the preſent rate (on an average) for thoſe pariſhes not under the direction of ſpecial Acts of Parliament. Some part of this reduction will proceed from a more judicious and deliberate diſtribution of relief, and not ſuffering its being claimed and demanded by the importunate at all hours as their right. In my opinion, there cannot be a more dangerous ſyſtem than this, either as it reſpects the happineſs and ultimate welfare of the objects requiring it, or ſociety in general.

I remember an obſervation made by a gentleman of much intelligence and information in all country buſineſs, which ſtruck me very forcibly. He obſerved, that if a perſon applies for pariſh relief, and gets a ſhilling from the officer, he will return when that is ſpent for another, in no better ſituation than before. If the ſame perſon is put in a method of earning the ſhilling by his own induſtry, when it is ſpent, he will have acquired a good

habit, and be able to go on earning another, and ſo on. This is the difference produced by a ſhilling obtained without labour, as a right, and a ſhilling obtained by induſtry; and this caſe occurs every day, and every hour of the day, in extenſive pariſhes. It is this dependence upon the Poors-rates that has occaſioned more poverty, idleneſs, and worthleſſneſs among a particular claſs of people in this country, than in any other.

I will venture to ſay, that if the whole revenue of this pariſh were diſtributed annually to thoſe who might ſolicit and demand it as their right, that there would be, at the end of the year, more helpleſs and wretched objects than at preſent. I have therefore ſet it down in my mind as a rule with ſcarce any exception, that the pariſh which goes on increaſing its rates, is adding in the ſame ratio to the miſery and wretchedneſs of its Poor. I am aware that the rates of one pariſh muſt be higher than thoſe of another containing more of the wealthy ranks in ſociety. The pariſh of Marylebone muſt have fewer Paupers than

than St. Giles's, and more property to tax for the relief of the Poor; but if either of them are increaſing, *gradatim*, their rates for the ſupport of the Poor, their number and wretchedneſs muſt be multiplying in the ſame ratio, and where are we to ſtop? I fear much, that with very few exceptions, this is taking place all over the kingdom. I will likewiſe venture to aſſert, that a diminution of rates ought to be taken as *prima facie* evidence of a diminution of poverty and wretchedneſs. In the year 1795, the rate that was granted in our pariſh was expended, and a debt of at leaſt one hundred pounds incurred. A ſubſcription was raiſed at the ſame time of upwards of three hundred and thirty pounds for the relief of the Poor, and this ſum was applied with great attention to that purpoſe. In the year 1797, the ſame rate provided for the Poor in a very ample manner, without any private ſubſcription, and left the ſum of upwards of ſix hundred pounds to pay old debts. It may be ſaid, that bread was a very heavy article

ticle of expence in 1795, which it certainly was, but the expence of maintaining the Poor in 1797 was greater in proportion from the increafed price of meat, butter, and cheefe, articles of great conſumption in our workhouſe. If it ſhould, therefore, be allowed, (and I truſt it will), that there was as little or leſs diſtreſs and wretchedneſs among the lower claſs of people, in the pariſh of Lewiſham, in the year 1797 than 1795, my argument is ſo far confirmed by practice.

It would, perhaps, be wrong to ſuppoſe, that all are equally ſanguine with myſelf reſpecting the extended good effects of this ſimple regulation, in giving a complete turn to the diſpoſition and interference of others in the management of the Poor; we ought, therefore, to conſider the benefit that muſt accrue by the checks put on the expenditure, without indulging hopes beyond thoſe which admit of proof. To make the preſent ſituation and powers of Overſeers better underſtood, let us ſuppoſe the appointment of

Treaſurer

Treaſurer aboliſhed in all public eſtabliſhments, and the funds to be collected by the people employed in expending and diſburſing the money, who are to bring, at the end of the year, their bills and receipts, as vouchers of the whole fund being ſpent. Let me aſk the *Commiſsioners* for a *turnpike truſt*, how it would anſwer to allow the collectors at the different gates to receive the money, and exerciſe their own diſcretion in ſpending it, without accounting, in any other way than by trades-peoples bills and receipts, at the end of the year, for the expenditure, and perhaps leaving ſome claims unſettled from the want of aſſets? This caſe would bear an exact reſemblance to the authority of an Overſeer, if the collector at the turnpike gate had it likewiſe in his power to raiſe his rate, on finding that his collection did not equal his extravagance in laying it out. I ſhould be glad to aſk the *Commiſsioner* how he would like to exerciſe the authority given him by Parliament, if diveſted of the power of placing, in the hands of a Treaſurer, the money collected,

collected, and directing the application of it. I believe very few would be found to act in that capacity, and why are we aſtoniſhed at gentlemen not interfering, in the concerns of the Poor under the preſent ſyſtem?

I ſhall only mention one other inſtance that muſt be familiar to every country gentleman. Let us ſuppoſe the appointment of Treaſurer for the county ſtock money, to be ſuſpended, and the different Overſeers, when called on for their quotas, to bring their pockets full of bills and receipts of diſburſements, for militia-mens' families, &c. deducting all, without order or inſpection, from the ſum to be paid, and making a tender of the balance (if any) to the perſon authoriſed to ſettle with him. This is exactly what happens at the paſsing of Overſeers annual accompts. I do not mean that he would bring unfounded vouchers, or ſuch as he could not ſwear to; but that importunity, fraud, and perhaps favour, would have extorted from him all the county ſtock money of his pariſh, I have

not the leaſt doubt of; and this would be in exact uniſon with the preſent diſpoſition of Poors-rates.

I truſt, that enough has been ſaid to ſhew the abſurdity of the exiſting ſyſtem, and to prove that the eſtabliſhed practice, in managing parochial funds, is contrary to common ſenſe, and to what has been univerſally adopted, and allowed to be neceſſary, in the financial department of all other public concerns; and a moment's reflection, on this mode of doing the buſineſs, will furniſh us with a full explanation of all that has happened in the caſe of the Poor, and the certain conſequence of applying a general fund in ſo looſe a manner.

We have to lament that the ſyſtem I have mentioned has not only tended to produce habits of idleneſs and vice in the objects improperly relieved, but may have likewiſe operated in forming habits in thoſe who have abuſed the rates, equally injurious to themſelves and the community,

nity, and with which every tranſaction in their lives will probably be tinged. This is an evil of great magnitude, which fair and honourable dealing could never occaſion. Money gained by honeſt and perſevering induſtry, is of much more value than what is obtained by ſuch means.

Though I do not expect that this regulation alone will embrace every object of reform, or even of improvement, in the management of the Poor, I am convinced, that all regulations which do not reach and remedy this great evil, the ſource of moſt others, will fall far ſhort of producing an effectual change. I would, therefore, moſt earneſtly recommend, "that all Overſeers, or others, em-
"ployed in expending, or directing the
"expenditure of money, appropriated to
"the relief of the Poor, ſhould be pro-
"hibited, by Act of Parliament, from
"being the collectors or receivers of any
"ſuch money, and obliging them, if it
"ever paſſes into their hands (by any
"means), to pay it immediately to

" the Treaſurer or Treaſurers appointed " by the hundred, diviſion, or pariſh, " without being at liberty to reſerve any " part of it whatever, on account of " claims againſt the pariſh."

An Act of Parliament, containing a clauſe to the above purpoſe, with others, giving authority to the juſtices of peace to appoint an inſpector or inſpectors, and ſome regulations, qualifying the right of voting at veſtries, and extending the power of juſtices in interrogating Overſeers reſpecting their accompts, would, in my opinion, give an immediate and complete turn to the whole buſineſs.

I have hitherto propoſed the means of relieving the Overſeer from much troubleſome duty, and have ſtill gone on the ſuppoſition, that the office remains, in other reſpects, as at preſent. I am ſure, that if we even ſtop ſhort here in regulating, much good will be done; but I confeſs that I anxiouſly wiſh to ſee the buſineſs conducted otherwiſe; though

though what I have recommended, reſpecting Treaſurer and Collector, muſt precede any attempt at inviting reſpectable characters to take upon them the management of the Poor.

The claims of the indigent and impotent to relief, from the funds of the opulent, have been ſo generally and liberally admitted, in this country, that we may venture to conclude, without any argument, that thoſe who are reduced by diſeaſe, age, or misfortunes, to penury and want, have a fair right to maintenance from the property of the country. I am, therefore, of opinion, that theſe ſhould be admitted or rejected, with all that impartiality and ſolemnity that is allowed to be due in every other caſe of claims to public protection, againſt the injuries of individuals, or in maintaining our right to property, conſidered by the laws of the land as our own. If I am right in this aſſertion, let us ſee if the claims of the Poor are decided, as the law ſtands, on this principle. Are their judges liable to

be warped by intereſts that may counteract the claims of real objects, and divert the application of the very liberal funds, ſupplied by the public, for their relief? Does it never happen that profligacy and worthleſſneſs obtain more than their proportion of this fund, to the encouragement of vice in the objects relieved, and the diſcouragement of virtue and morality in the modeſt and deſerving Poor? Does it never happen that the parent of a large family, broken down by diſeaſe, receives but the ſame pittance as the ſingle vagrant, who has himſelf only to ſupport, without enquiring into the relative merits of each? Does it never happen that the ſame meritorious object is ſent in deſpair and anguiſh from the Overſeer's door with a frown; though conſcious, at the ſame time, that part of the large ſums collected in the pariſh is intended for ſuch as himſelf, perhaps part of it paid by himſelf? I ſhall leave theſe queſtions to be anſwered by any one who has a knowledge of parochial buſineſs, according to his own experience of it.

Viewing

Viewing therefore the hearing and deciding on the claims of the Poor, as an act of juſtice which ought to be adminiſtered by a deſcription of people as pure in their intentions, and diſintereſted in their motives, as any ſet of gentlemen who ſit in judgement in any courts of the kingdom; we are to conſider what probability there is of finding men of reſpectable characters willing to do this duty.

I have pointed out the propriety of ſeparating much of the executive part of the duty from the deliberative, even on the ſuppoſition of Overſeers continuing as now appointed; but my preſent idea renders this arrangement if poſsible more indiſpenſible; for we ſhall never be able to draw the attention of men of reſpectability to decide on the claims of the Poor, if they are to be loaded with the executive part of the duty. We might as well expect that the Bench of Juſtices would contain as many able and upright characters as at preſent, if they were obliged to perform in perſon the duties

now done by conſtables and other officers acting under them.

We have next to conſider what expectation there may be of perſons diſintereſted in their views and conduct, accepting the ſituation of *Juſtices* in the cauſe of the Poor, when there are ſo few of this deſcription to be found managing their concerns at this time. The duty I propoſe for them to do is ſo analogous to that of the preſent Juſtices of the Peace, that I ſhould hope the appointment would be as much an object of ambition and choice as we are told the other is. Mr. Ruggles, in his hiſtory of the Poor ſays, "The inſer-" tion of a name in the Commiſsion of the " Peace, is now frequently ſolicited as an ". honour." I think there will not be much difficulty in proving, that few employments can be ſo pleaſing and gratifying to humanity as the adminiſtration of juſtice to the Poor, with ample means from the purſe of the public, of granting effectual relief. While Juſtices of Peace are frequently obliged to puniſh offenders

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againſt the laws of their country, by fine and impriſonment, the Juſtices I ſpeak of will have to reward indigent merit, and admoniſh the unfair claimant, in ſuch a manner as to ſend him away ſatisfied with the deciſion, and reſolved to mend his habits and manners. This compariſon of the two duties is ſo far in favour of the latter, that I have not a doubt of the ſituation being more ſought after than that of Juſtice of Peace, if an equal degree of conſequence is attached to it. If the appointment of Juſtice of the Peace is ſo honourable, and ſo much an object of ambition, the adminiſtration of juſtice to the Poor with character and credit, ſhould be made the channel for obtaining it; and ſurely the ſchool would be a good one, for qualifying gentlemen to that important office.

I have been long of opinion, that one of the moſt effectual methods which this country could adopt to ward off the impending danger from thoſe horrid principles which have deſtroyed a neighbouring

ing kingdom, would be, to draw into closer union and connection the Pastor of a parish and the inferior ranks of society; and I am convinced this would be best done by making it the resident Clergyman's duty to become acquainted with the objects of charity in his parish, to give him the power of relieving them, and of recommending them on account of their moral and decent behaviour; proving to them the advantage of character, and propriety of conduct, in their claims for parochial relief; while the profligate and worthless would be marked by every discouraging circumstance, and forced into habits of industry, morality, and decency of deportment, as their only, or best chance of meeting with that assistance in the day of distress, which is now indiscriminately given to, or with-held from all.

I am therefore of opinion, that if the business of the Poor were placed on that footing which would annihilate jobs, and of course diminish disputes, the resident Clergyman should *(ex officio)* be one of the Managers or Justices for the

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concerns of the Poor; and if the living is ſmall, or the duty done by a Curate, a compenſation ſhould be granted to him for his trouble, from the penalties of thoſe gentlemen who decline the ſervice; ſo that his remuneration would be in exact proportion to the load that is thrown on him by others ſhrinking from it. The reward ſhould not be in the form of a fixed ſalary, but as a gratuity, and its quantum ſhould be ſettled by the gentlemen on the Bench, after a general review of the management of the Poor of his pariſh, at the end of the year. This would, I conceive, be a moſt excellent method of improving the ſituation of Curates with ſmall incomes, and would draw the attention of all Clergymen to what ought to be conſidered as a very eſſential part of their duty. My own obſervation and experience give me reaſon to think that we have loſt the ſervices of many worthy Clergymen in directing the concerns of the Poor, from the ſame cauſe that has deprived us of the exertions of other diſintereſted and able adviſers.

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The remarks I have made on the ſubject of Juſtices to decide on the claims of the Poor, have carried me, in expreſsions of future hopes and expectations, beyond what I intended on the preſent occaſion. The idea, when connected with the exiſting ſtate of things, appears impracticable, and I rather mention it as the probable conſequence of carrying into execution what I have propoſed, than what ſhould be in immediate contemplation. We muſt begin by adopting certain fixed principles, founded on experience and general practice in ſimilar caſes, after which all the good we have ſo long endeavoured to bring about in managing for the Poor will be gradually produced, as the reſult of a judicious and regular ſyſtem, conducted ſo as to bring the whole buſineſs into one point of view.

IN order to ſecure all the advantages which the firſt part of this plan is likely to produce to the Poor and the public, it ſeems highly neceſſary that the general prac-

practice of the country ſhould be brought into one point of view in a conciſe and ſyſtematical form, ſeparating the good from the bad, generally circulating and diffuſing the former, and expoſing the errors and inaccuracies of the latter. As I have propoſed that we ſhould rather be guided and directed by experience than allow ourſelves to be led away by theoretical ſpeculations on this ſubject, I am of opinion that all our Acts of Parliament for regulating the affairs of the Poor in detail, ſhould be founded on general annual reports of their actual ſtate. The fact is, that all Acts introduced for the benefit of the Poor have contained many clauſes which (from their being formed more on theory than practice) have provoked a difference of opinion and oppoſition that leads us to deſpair of ever ſeeing the buſineſs well arranged in this way. There are clauſes in the laſt Bill brought into Parliament by Mr. Pitt, which have been ſeverely animadverted on, but I am convinced that ſome of them (ſuch as Schools of Induſtry, Parochial Funds for the encouragement of ſubſcribers for their

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own relief, &c.) might be eaſily reduced to practice on the new formation of things, but which appear impracticable at preſent, and under the exiſting ſyſtem would certainly remain ſo.

If there be a great national ſubject or public inſtitution that requires the ſuperintendance and controul of a Board of Commiſsioners more than any other, it is that of which I am now ſpeaking; where the detailed management of near Thirteen Thouſand pariſhes muſt be arranged, and general concluſions pointed out from this extended practice, before Parliament or the public can ever have a clear and comprehenſive view of the whole. I believe I am warranted in ſaying, that experience has proved the advantage of managing great and extenſive national concerns by ſuch means, and that the adoption of Boards have generally equalled the expectations of the public in the benefits derived from them. The expence has been the great argument againſt them, but in this inſtance

ſtance the eſtabliſhment might be paid from the parochial fund, the ſavings on which would be beyond all proportion to the ſmall ſum expended; and this advantage muſt be trifling when compared to the great national good of communicating the ſucceſsful and approved practice of one diſtrict or pariſh to another, and of pointing out the defects and errors that may prevail for a time. The duties of ſuch a Board would in its early ſtage be perhaps laborious and ſomewhat intricate, but if compoſed of gentlemen qualified for the buſineſs, and enabled from their ſituation to devote their whole time and attention to it, there can be little doubt of all difficulties being ſoon overcome, and that it would prove a channel of communication to the public that muſt infallibly render all that concerns the management of the Poor clear and intelligible, which have hitherto been ſtudiouſly kept obſcure.

What good may not be done by an efficient Board in ſelecting a ſucceſsful practice from the detailed management of

ſo many thouſand pariſhes, and in diffuſing and circulating the ſame with that recommendation or authority which Parliament in its wiſdom might think fit to give them? I do not recollect that the appointment of a Board of Commiſsioners, in the manner I have propoſed, has formed any part of preceding plans for the affairs of the Poor, but the principle of ſuperintendance and controul has been fully admitted by Mr. Gilbert, whoſe bill recommended the nomination of County Commiſsioners and others poſſeſsing a general authority. The laſt bill introduced by Mr. Pitt propoſes County Guardians, with great controling powers, who are to be paid for their ſervices, (by which means much uſeful information might be obtained) and they are directed to tranſmit their proceedings to the Privy Council. The abilities and integrity of the members thereof qualify them highly for the office of ſuperintendance, but it cannot be ſuppoſed that they could give that conſtant and indefatigable attention to a concern where every ſtage and branch of it is ſo con-

connected and interwoven that a general arrangement can only be made clear and explicit by the ſame gentlemen who devote their whole time to it. It would therefore deſtroy the great object to be obtained by a Board of Commiſsioners, if the buſineſs were taken up in a fluctuating and curſory manner by different people, whatever their abilities, integrity, and zeal in the cauſe might be.

The preſent ſpirit of inveſtigation into the method of clothing, feeding, and employing the Poor with comfort and economy, ſeems peculiarly favourable for the exertions of a Board, whoſe operation ſhould probably be much confined to availing itſelf of what has been reduced to practice with advantage. It will be unneceſſary for me to tell thoſe who have read the publications of Count Rumford, what wonderful things may be done in adminiſtering to the comforts of the Poor, conſiſtently with a ſyſtem of economy in food, fuel, and clothing. His practice with that of many others who have ſo

much to the credit of their public ſpirit extended the benefits of his plan, in the form of public kitchens, and cheap ſoups, has not in any inſtance that I know of been adopted by the Overſeers of pariſh workhouſes.

I conſider it therefore as one of the great misfortunes in the preſent ſyſtem, that thoſe who have the application of millions of the Poors-rates, have neither contributed to the improvement of the method of treating the Poor, nor even employed thoſe means, the advantages of which have been ſo fully aſcertained.

I truſt that all who have the comforts of the Poor at heart, will read with attention what has been publiſhed by *the Society for bettering their Condition, and increaſing their Comforts.* The expence of a few pounds in publiſhing, has already done more good by pointing out the beſt method of relieving and aſſiſting the indigent, than the accumulated information from the millions annually expended by Overſeers.

ſeers. In reading theſe papers I have been often ſtruck with the want of communication from thoſe who have the actual management of the Poor, and have as frequently attempted to calculate what advantage might be derived to the public, by furniſhing a Board of Commiſsioners with the power of collecting and communicating parochial information.

I am much afraid that very few of the Overſeers are as yet acquainted with the ſucceſsful methods adopted by Count Rumford, in the management of fuel. They have yet to learn perhaps that a dinner may be dreſſed with one-tenth of the quantity of fuel uſually employed, that this plan has been reduced to practice with equal ſucceſs at the Foundling Hoſpital in this country, and in the erection of public kitchens in town, where labourers have a full and comfortable breakfaſt and dinner of ſoup at the rate of fourpence per day, and if they indulge in roaſt meat and vegetables, a meſs of it may be had for the ſame money.

I likewiſe doubt if Overſeers in general have yet availed themſelves of much valuable information, contained in the above and other publications, reſpecting the different articles which afford nouriſhment, and may be employed to the greateſt advantage. It is important to know, that the Foundling Hoſpital has ſaved upwards of two hundred pounds a year, by introducing the uſe of rice, and that it is found to be extremely ſalutary and palatable. The ſaving of flour, to the Foundling, was upwards of ſeventeen thouſand pounds weight, in the year of its greateſt ſcarcity. What a valuable ſubſtitute is to be found for bread in rice! Multiplying the means of ſubſiſtence, by increaſing the number of articles of diet, inſtead of placing our dependence on one, is of the firſt importance. This interchange of the produce of different countries, is one of the many advantages derived from the preſent general and ſpirited intercourſe with diſtant parts. The Eaſtern world is, at preſent, indebted to this country for the introduction and uſe of

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the potatoe, a plant which thrives in a ſeaſon inimical to the growth of rice, and may therefore prevent the poſsibility of the natives ſuffering by famine, as on former occaſions. We may be amply repaid by a ſupply of rice, to keep us from the danger of ſuffering, as we did two years ago, by the high price of bread.

I am much afraid, that the various plans of Schools of Induſtry, Village Shops, Spinning Schools, and Friendly Societies, have not yet engaged the attention of many who have acted as Overſeers, or at leaſt that they have not been reduced to practice by them. The valuable account of the Workhouſe at Boldre, in Hampſhire, as given by Mr. Gilpin, conveys much important information, applicable to the management of Pariſh Workhouſes, on a ſimilar ſcale. It was my good fortune to have an opportunity of viſiting this Workhouſe, and the order, economy, and cleanlineſs, practiſed there, aſtoniſhed me very much. The detail of the management in this Houſe, ſhould be

in the hands of every Overſeer. The very low rate at which the Poor are fed at Boldre, as ſtated before, was explained to me by the deduction of the value of their labour from the expence, in the very liberal uſe of vegetables, the produce of a very large garden belonging to the Houſe, and by the frequent uſe of Pork, which anſwers extremely well. I was likewiſe told that cabbage, potatoes, and onions, were frequently fried with gravy or lard, ſeaſoned with pepper and ſalt, and preferred to bread and cheeſe by them.

A worthy Magiſtrate,* who has been employed, with equal ſucceſs, in detecting and correcting vice, and affording comfort to the indigent, has had an active ſhare in eſtabliſhing a meat and ſoup charity, in the city, where (wonderful to tell) the ſum of one thouſand ſix hundred and ſixty-nine pounds, including all charges, fed ten thouſand men women and children, twice a week, for five months. What might not the Poors-rates in this kingdom do, if applied with the ſame

* Mr. Colquhoun.

ſame judgment and economy? My experience has not ſuggeſted to me a better method of adminiſtering to the comforts of the Poor than this, whether done by the pariſh or the individual. In the latter caſe, by purchaſing a few tickets at a public kitchen, encouragement is given to the eſtabliſhment, and the Poor have a better chance of a comfortable meal, than if the money had been given to them. Families in the country, with the aſsiſtance of a garden, can make ſoup at a very eaſy rate, and they will find their neighbours in general very grateful for it.

The plan, however, that approaches neareſt to that ſort of pariſh relief, which the regulations I have recommended would probably produce, is inſtituted by a ſociety at Hull, and given to the public by Mr. Wilberforce, in the fifth report of the Society for increaſing the comforts of the Poor. The buſineſs of the Hull Society is conducted by a Committee, a Treaſurer, two Stewards, a Surgeon, and twenty Viſitors. Their ſubſcription,

in the courſe of two years and a half, amounted to five hundred and ſixty-ſix pounds, in which time three hundred ſick perſons were admitted on their books, and ſupplied with medicines, &c. The Poor were relieved by weekly donations of money, butchers meat, bread, flour, wine, and apparel, in five thouſand five hundred and ſixty-nine inſtances, leaving a balance of one hundred and forty-three pounds in the hands of the treaſurer. This inſtitution has (in the language of the humane reporter) " produced a change in the mo-
" rals, conduct, and circumſtances, of the
" greater part of thoſe who have been
" the objects of the charity. The drunk-
" ard has become ſober, the idle in-
" duſtrious, and the profane and irre-
" ligious have been brought to a regular
" attendance on divine ſervice, of which
" they had before lived in the entire neg-
" lect. Pariſhes have been induced or
" *obliged* to allow a proper maintenance
" to their own Poor; and fraudulent beg-
" gars and vagrants have been compelled
" to abandon their trade, and return to

" their

"their ſettlements." It is not poſsible to conſider this ſtatement, without having an earneſt wiſh that ſuch a ſociety could have placed the whole of the Poors-rates of Hull in the hands of the ſame Treaſurer, to have been applied on exactly the ſame principle. If medical aſsiſtance was given to three hundred, and objects relieved in more than five thouſand five hundred inſtances, with the ſmall ſum of four hundred and forty-three pounds, what good might not be done by the collected Poors-rates of Hull? If ſuch a Committee is found volunteering their ſervices, and furniſhing the means of doing all this good, there cannot be any doubt of the ſame ſpirit and zeal being employed, if more ample funds had been put into their hands, without the interference or wrangling of ſelfiſh jobbers. I have juſt mentioned an experiment that could not fail to make a ſtrong impreſsion on a Board of Commiſsioners, and would furniſh them with materials of the firſt importance for general practice. This is a plan that might be generally adopted,

if the Poors-rates were placed in the hands of a Treaſurer, and only liable to be drawn from thence for purpoſes of actual relief.

My limited means of information have brought to my knowledge the practice of a pariſh which ſeems highly worthy of imitation. I mean the pariſh of St. John's, Southwark; which has been regulated, for the laſt twelve years, by a Special Act of Parliament, one ſtriking feature of which is, the appointment of a Treaſurer, who is not to make any payment but by an order, in writing, under the hands of ſeven Directors or Governors. The rates of this pariſh were as high as ſix ſhillings in the pound, with a debt of five or ſix hundred pounds, when the Act of Parliament was obtained, ſince which the rates have not exceeded half a crown, and they have a proſpect of maintaining the Poor, this year, for two ſhillings. I have not a doubt, that the comforts of the really indigent, and habits of the idle, have been improved in the ſame ratio with a dimi-

a diminution of Poors-rates. The ſaving here has exceeded my moſt ſanguine calculations; but the fact is, that this pariſh, in addition to other advantages, is peculiarly fortunate in a Treaſurer,* who has performed his duty with much honour and ſteady unbiaſſed attention to the intereſts of all concerned, ever ſince the Act of Parliament was procured.

I ſhould have much pleaſure in detailing more of the good that has been done by the humane and ſpirited exertions of individuals, but, I truſt, that what I have pointed out, ſhews, that a field is open for the exerciſe of economy and improvement in the management of the Poor, conſiſtently with the greateſt attention to their happineſs and well being. I cannot however deny myſelf the ſatisfaction of ſtating the great good that has been done by giving cottagers ſome land, and enabling them to keep a cow, or cows, as recommended and practiſed by Lord Winchelſea with aſtoniſhing ſucceſs.

The

* Mr. Thomas Allen.

The objects I have already mentioned as proper to engage the conſtant care and attention of a Board of Commiſſioners are great, but their ſervices might extend much further.

It ſhould be their duty to lay before Parliament, annually, a conciſe report of the general method of treating the Poor, with a relative rate of expence, marking increaſe or decreaſe, with their cauſes. It would then be the buſineſs of Parliament to attend to their ſuggeſtions, and aid their endeavours as far, as they in their wiſdom might think fit, and the eligibility of their plans were warranted by practice.

We ſhould then quit the wild regions of theory and ſpeculation, on a ſubject where theory and practice are frequently at variance, and proceed in the ſlow but ſure track of experience.

By theſe means we ſhall arrive at all the perfection which human nature admits

mits of in managing the general concerns of the Poor; a *ſcience*, ſurpaſsing all others in its importance, either as a great national object, or as the means of *bettering the condition, and increaſing the comforts* of the worthy, but indigent members of ſociety; and improving the ſtate of the idle and vicious, by compelling them to adopt habits of induſtry and morality, and truſt to character for bearing them up when misfortunes befal them.

FINIS.

Ex. J. M.
1/16/05